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Govt tables bill against social boycott in Assembly

Violators will face 3 yrs jail, bill aims to eradicate discrimination

BELAGAVI, 11 DEC

The Karnataka government on Thursday tabled a landmark bill in the Assembly to prohibit and criminalise the social boycott of individuals or groups, particularly by caste panchayats. The Karnataka Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2025, introduced by Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa, seeks to eliminate discriminatory practices that continue across several communities.

The bill prescribes imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh for imposing or practising any form of social boycott. It defines 20 forms of boycott, including refusal to work with or hire someone, denial of services or business opportunities, barring participation in social or religious gatherings, blocking access to community facilities, enforcing ostracism and severing social ties.

The draft law notes that such unconstitutional practices and extrajudicial punishments by caste and community panchayats cause "great harassment" and undermine social harmony, and that existing laws are inadequate. Any meeting held to plan or discuss a boycott will be deemed "unlawful" and may attract a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh. Aiding or abetting such acts will also invite similar penalties. Offences will be cognisable and bailable. A Social Boycott Prohibition Officer will be appointed to detect and act on violations. The government also introduced the Greater Bengaluru Governance (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025, which inducts MPs, MLAs and MLCs into the Greater Bengaluru Authority. *—PTI*

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DyCM DK Shivakumar addresses the Assembly as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah looks on at Suvarna Soudha in Belagavi on Thursday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

CM announces reservations for sportspersons

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday announced new reservation quotas to encourage sportspersons in Karnataka, including 3 per cent in the Forest Department, 3% in the Police Department and 2 per cent across other government departments. He said 13 athletes who won medals at the Olympics, Paralympics, Commonwealth and Asian Games have already been appointed, along with 70 constables and 14 PSIs recruited directly in the Police Department. The government is also exploring additional measures to promote Kabaddi.

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Luthra brothers detained in Thailand, HC says no to bail

PANAJI, 11 DEC

Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, brothers and the co-owners of the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub have been detained by Thai authorities in relation to the tragic blaze which killed twenty-five people on 6 December in Goa. Union Minister Shripad Naik confirmed the arrest. Separately, a Delhi court today rejected their anticipatory bail plea. A Goa Police team is scheduled to travel to Bangkok shortly to complete the handover formalities. According to officials, the co-owners immediately attempted to evade arrest by booking air tickets for Phuket through a travel portal at 1.17am on 7 December, a little over an hour after learning about the fire at their nightclub. An Interpol Blue Corner notice was issued on 9 December following a request from the Goa police routed through the CBI.

On 10 December, the accused's council sought four weeks of transit anticipatory bail so that they were not immediately arrested after their return to Delhi from Thailand. On 11 December, Additional Sessions Judge dismissed the plea. *— PTI*

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Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra were detained by the Thailand Police

IndiGo cancels 60 Bengaluru flights, DGCA summons CEO

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Crisis-hit IndiGo has cancelled 60 flights from Bengaluru Airport, a source confirmed, as the airline faces intense scrutiny from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) following widespread disruptions caused by planning failures during the introduction of new pilot and crew duty norms. The cancellations include 32 arrivals and 28 departures.

IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers has been summoned by the DGCA and ordered to appear at 3pm on Thursday, along with a detailed report and data explaining the airline's recent operational breakdown. Despite the on-going issues, the carrier said it expects to operate more than 1,950 flights on Thursday.

IndiGo, which usually runs over 2,200 daily flights under the winter schedule, has already had its operations cut by 10 per cent under a government directive aimed at stabilising services. Cancellations peaked at 1,600 flights on 5 December and have since declined, though disruptions continue.

To tighten oversight, the DGCA has deployed two officials to IndiGo's Gurgaon headquarters to monitor cancellations, crew deployment, unplanned leave, refunds, passenger compensation, and on-time performance. Separate teams will also conduct immediate inspections across 11 airports. *—PTI*

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SIR deadline extended in 5 states, 1 UT

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Election Commission extended the timeline for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in six states and Union Territories following requests from Chief Electoral Officers.

In a statement on Thursday, the Election Commission (EC) issued the revised schedule for SIR in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Uttar Pradesh.

The enumeration period for these six states and UTs was scheduled to end on Thursday, and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on 16 December.

The decision came against the backdrop of suggestions that many electors had not been able to submit forms.

The ECI is in overdrive to re-verify 'ASD' or absent, shifted and dead/duplicate electors with whom contact could not be established by BLOs despite three attempts.

Many Opposition parties have been alleging that the stringent deadlines have taken a toll on the BLOs, leading them to commit suicide.

The enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended till 14 December, and the draft electoral rolls will be published on 19 December, the statement said.

For Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration period has been extended till 18 December, and the draft electoral rolls will be published on 23 December.

The enumeration period for Uttar Pradesh has been extended till 26 December, and the draft will be published on 31 December. The enumeration period for Goa, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Rajasthan and West Bengal will end on Thursday, and the draft will be published on 16 December. *— PTI*

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The enumeration period for six states was scheduled to end on Thursday, and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on 16 Dec ***PHOTO: PTI***

21 killed, 1 survives as truck falls into gorge in Arunachal

TINSUKIA, 11 DEC

At least 21 people from Assam's Tinsukia district have been confirmed dead and one person survived after the truck they were travelling in plunged into a deep gorge in Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The incident occurred earlier this week on the remote Hayuliang–Chaglagam Road in Anjaw district in the eastern part of the state. Tinsukia Deputy Commissioner Swapneel Paul said that authorities were alerted around 11am, after which they contacted officials in Anjaw and Tezu for verification. Rescue teams have since recovered 18 bodies and found one survivor, while the search continues for the missing labourers.

A team comprising a circle officer and police personnel has been dispatched from Tinsukia to gather further details. The area is extremely remote, and officials expect clearer information once they reach the spot.

Preliminary reports suggest the labourers, employed by a private contractor, were travelling in a dumper lorry that skidded off the road and fell nearly 1,000 feet into a gorge.

Tinsukia Police Superintendent Mayank Kumar said 22 labourers from Dhelaghat in Gillapukri Tea Estate had gone to Arunachal Pradesh for hostel construction work. Of them, 21 are feared dead. One labourer, Budheswor Deep, survived and alerted families on Wednesday morning. *—PTI*

An Army personnel during a search and rescue operation in Hayuliang, Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

TRUMP LOST INDIA?

US lawmaker blames Trump for Modi, Putin bonhomie

WASHINGTON DC/ NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

US Congresswoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove criticised President Donald Trump's policies towards India, warning they are causing "real and lasting damage" to strategic trust between the two countries. Speaking at the House Foreign Affairs South and Central Asia Subcommittee hearing on the US–India partnership, she said Trump's coercive approach, including 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods and a USD 1,00,000 fee on H1B visas, was pushing India towards Russia. Displaying the widely circulated photograph of Prime Minister Nar-endra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a car, she said the image "spoke a thousand words" about the consequences of US pressure.

Kamlager-Dove warned that unless Trump changes course, he risks being remembered as the President who "lost India," even as he "revitalised the Russian Empire." She accused him of undermining years of bipartisan efforts to strengthen ties. Representative Pramila Jayapal also raised concerns over tariff escalations and immigration barriers, noting the economic damage to both countries. Her remarks came a day after Trump accused India of "dumping" rice in the US.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump held a phone conversation on Thursday fo-cused on reinvigorating economic ties and advancing a trade deal. The leaders reviewed progress under the India–US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and discussed expanding cooperation in critical tech-nologies, energy, and defence. *—PTI*

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Sydney Kamlager-Dove displays Modi and Putin's pic in the United States Congress ***PHOTO: X***

Umar Khalid gets interim bail for sister's wedding

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

A Delhi court on Thursday granted interim bail from 16 to 29 December to former JNU student Umar Khalid to attend his sister's wedding.

Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai granted interim relief to Khalid, who is an accused in the case regarding the larger conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots.

The judge directed the accused to furnish a personal bond of Rs 20,000 and two sureties of like amount. "During the interim bail period, the applicant (Khalid) shall not use the social media," the court said, directing him to "only meet his family members, relatives and friends". It said Khalid also had to "remain at his home or at the places where the ceremonies are held. *—PTI*

AFTER US, MEXICO IMPOSES 50% TARIFFS ON INDIAN GOODS

MEXICO CITY, 11 DEC

Mexico's Senate approved tariffs of up to 50 per cent on Wednesday on a wide range of imports from India, China and several other Asian nations in an attempt to please Trump.

The tariff hike, which will come into effect on 1 January 2026, will see duties up to 50 per cent on goods like automobiles, auto parts, textiles, plastics and steel from countries that don't have a trade deal with Mexico. This means countries like India, South Korea, China, Thailand and Indonesia will be impacted.

The move is intended to generate USD 3.76 billion in additional revenue next year. The development comes at a time when Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum looks to boost domestic production. However, analysts said the move was an attempt to please Trump before a review by Washington of the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA). *—PTI*

Taluk hospitals, health centres to be open 24/7

DGR says State will double staff, asks why some govt doctors are taking private salaries

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in Belagavi on Tuesday *PHOTO: SALAR*

BELAGAVI, 11 DEC

- Congress MLA Bharamgouda Kage reiterated his demand for a separate North Karnataka State in the Assembly, alleging discrimination of funds

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao, on Thursday, told the Legislative Assembly that the State government aims to ensure 24-hour service at all taluk hospitals and community health centres.

This will be achieved by ensuring the availability of the necessary number of doctors, specialists, and medical staff.

Rao for was responding to a question raised by BJP MLA Doddanagouda H Patil of Kushtagi during the Question Hour.

"Our aim is to ensure that every taluk hospital provides 24-hour service. In many places, there is only one obstetrician, one anaesthetist, and one paediatrician, but they stop working after 4pm. After that, taluk hospitals remain empty," Rao said. "To ensure 24-hour service, we will now ensure two obstetricians, two anaesthetists, two paediatricians, one radiologist, and one physician at each taluk hospital. We want to ensure that people receive care whenever they need it."

Rao pointed out that maternal deaths are often caused by a lack of timely medical attention. He said that the government wants community health centres (CHS) to operate round-the-clock.

"At CHCs where performance is low, if there are fewer than 30 deliveries, we will replace the gynaecologist with two MBBS doctors and a physician," he said, adding that CHCs that stop working after 4pm will now be required to provide 24-hour service.

Karkala BJP MLA V Sunil Kumar raised a concern regarding a note issued by the health secretary on relocating specialists from CHCs with fewer than 30 deliveries, warning that this may create problems in the future.

Addressing the issue, Rao highlighted the disparity in government doctors' work output, noting that some doctors receive salaries of Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 3 lakh but perform minimal duties. "Some doctors do only three to five deliveries a month, or sometimes none."

Rao added, "Some doctors take government salaries but practice privately. What is the point of paying them such high salaries?"

On filling vacant positions, Rao said that around 1,500 MBBS doctors are being hired under the compulsory medical service. There are also vacancies for approximately 800-900 specialist doctors. Rao further stated that permission had been granted to recruit 600 nurses, 400 lab technicians, and 400 pharmacists on a contract basis. *—PTI*

QUOTE of THE DAY

Amit Shah should have basic knowledge of 'vote chori'. At (Jawaharlal Nehru's) time, there were ballots, and now there are no ballots. How can there be 'chori' when there were ballots?

—DK SHIVAKUMAR,
Deputy Chief Minister

GOVT SCHOOLS ENROLLMENT DROPPED BY 17L IN 15YRS

Enrolment in government-run schools in Karnataka has dropped by 17 lakh over the past 15 years, School Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa informed the Legislative Assembly on Thursday. He attributed the decline to parents preferring English-medium education, a growing interest in central syllabi, migration, and the increasing number of private schools. The information was provided in a written reply to BJP MLA and former education minister S Suresh Kumar.

RS 47 CRORE SPENT ON CM'S FLIGHTS IN 2 YEARS

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's flights on aircraft and helicopters between May 2023 and November 2025 cost the state around Rs 47 crore. Siddaramaiah provided the information to BJP MLC N Ravi Kumar in the Council. In the past two-and-a-half years, Siddaramaiah has flown to Mysuru 22 times, incurring travel expenses of over 5 crore for the Bengaluru–Mysuru route, which takes about two-and-a-half hours by road.

HATE SPEECH BILL IS FOR THE CONSTITUTION, SAYS DKS

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Thursday said that the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crime (Prevention) Bill was to safeguard constitutional values, as he dismissed critics. "If the BJP refrains from indulging in hate speech, everything will be fine. They have been the pioneers of creating hostility, be it through caste-based, religious, or personal attacks," he said at the Belagavi Circuit House. "This legislation is meant to safeguard the Constitution."

BIOENERGY MEET

PHOTO: SALAR

SE Sudheendra, Chairman of the Karnataka State Bioenergy Development Board, met Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav at Bengaluru HAL Airport on Thursday. They discussed bioenergy initiatives in both states and the goal of increasing new and renewable energy use by 30 per cent by 2027. They agreed to collaborate on coordinating bioenergy investors and biomass suppliers, especially farmers. Yadav invited a Karnataka delegation to visit Madhya Pradesh.

SC bins Prajwal Revanna's plea to transfer cases

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna to transfer the trial of two criminal cases against him before the special MP/MLA court in Bengaluru to another city court.

Revanna, who was handed a life sentence for raping a domestic worker, had argued that the cases should not be heard by the same judge who sentenced him in the first case.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi responded that the judge's observations cannot be a ground to allege bias. They rejected the argument, saying that judges assess cases based on evidence.

Senior advocates Siddharth Luthra and Siddarth Dave, representing Revanna, said that the judge made some adverse comments against lawyers too.

Justice Bagchi said that lawyers cannot hold judicial officers to ransom and make allegations against them. CJI Kant said that Revanna's counsel can furnish an apology before the High Court, as it is unethical to allege bias. *—PTI*

BELAGAVI VILLAGERS MAY BE MOVED OVER MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

BELAGAVI, 11 DEC

Steps will be taken to relocate the residents of Amagaon village in Belagavi district to curb human-wildlife conflict and to integrate forest-dwelling communities with society, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandra said on Thursday.

The assurance came after the residents of Amagaon, located inside the forests of Khanapur taluk, met him and submitted a relocation request.

Addressing the residents, Khandre said that after he took charge, 27 families from Talewadi in the Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary were relocated voluntarily. The Bhimgad sanctuary is not a tiger reserve.

Similarly, steps will be taken to relocate Amagaon and other settlements as well, he said, in a statement.

Khandre said that some people were spreading misinformation regarding the Talewadi relocation.

"Relocating settlements inside forests will help to bring forest dwellers into the mainstream. It will also reduce human-wildlife conflict. Forests will also regenerate better without human intervention," he said.

He pointed out that while some demand all kinds of facilities for themselves, they expect forest dwellers to remain in the forest without any basic amenities.

"They unnecessarily complain to block welfare programmes launched with good intent by the government. They also mislead forest dwellers," he said. *— PTI*

Part of Mysuru Palace's gate, roof falls

MYSURU, 11 DEC

A portion of the roof plaster above the south entrance of the Mysuru Palace fell off on Thursday, but no injuries were reported. A small section of the roof over the Varaha Gate entrance fell onto a staff member's parked bike.

After the incident, Mysore Palace Board authorities installed barricades near the gate, preventing the entry of the public until further orders.

The entry gates of iconic Mysore Amba Vilas Palace including Balarama and Varaha Gates of Mysuru Palace. They have attractive artwork, cusped arches and paintings on its walls. There is an urgent need to conserve these gates as every year about 40 to 50 lakh tourists including 40,000 foreigners visits iconic Mysuru Palace,

A small section of the roof over the Varaha Gate entrance fell on Thursday, but no injuries were reported *PHOTO: SALAR*

Historian and District Heritage Committee member Prof Rangaraju told Salar News. He said gates and welcome arches for at least 200 heritage buildings across Mysuru needed immediate restoration. *—Salar News*

Police take action against provocative social media posts

MANGALURU, 11 DEC

Police have launched an investigation after uncovering a series of alarming and inciteful posts on Instagram, allegedly designed to stoke communal hatred and glorify violence in Mangaluru.

The FIR, filed by Police Sub-Inspector Anita Nikkam of the Kankanady Town Police Station, details how the officer monitoring social media on 2 December, following directives from senior officials, discovered multiple accounts disseminating inflammatory content.

The FIR indicates that the posts and stories on 16 Instagram accounts featured disturbing images of unidentified individuals wielding various weapons with many concealing their identities.

Police noted that the posts were aimed at instilling fear, inciting violence, and fostering hostility between communities, thereby jeopardising public order in Mangaluru. The FIR further states that the content seems to be part of a broader scheme to incite religious hatred, promote unlawful activities, and undermine peace and communal harmony in the region. Given that Mangaluru is identified as a "sensitive region," the police expressed concern over the possibility of a coordinated effort to induce terror, provoke riots, and encourage conspiratorial criminal behaviour through social media. *—PTI*

Three die after car and bus collision in Devanahalli

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

A tragic accident on the outskirts of Bengaluru has claimed the lives of three individuals when a speeding car collided head-on with a KSRTC bus near Devanahalli. The incident occurred late on Wednesday at Lalagondanahalli Gate, according to police reports. The deceased occupants of the car, identified as Mohan Kumar, 33, Suman, 28, and Sagar, 23, were all residents of Sadahalli in Devanahalli taluk. Preliminary investigations suggest that the car was travelling from Chikkaballapur towards Devanahalli at high speed when the driver lost control, veered across the divider, and collided with the bus. Several passengers on the bus sustained minor injuries. The police have confirmed that an investigation into the incident is currently underway. *—PTI*

LOVE FOR 'THE DEVIL'

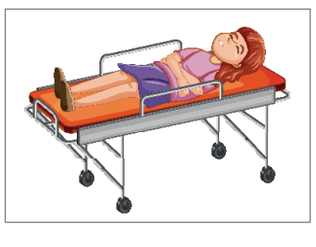
'The Devil', a Kannada action drama starring Darshan Thoogudeepa was received with fanfare and fireworks in Bengaluru on Thursday. The Prakash directorial is released as the actor is lodged in jail for the Renukaswamy murder case *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Bad food at govt hostel puts 30 in hospital

YADGIR, 11 DEC

At least 30 girl students of the Post-Matric Backward Classes Welfare Department Girls' Hostel in Yadgir district fell ill on Wednesday night, allegedly due to consuming contaminated food and water. The affected students were admitted to the Community Health Centre (CHC) in the town.

Doctors said that four students from the hostel in Gurmitkal town in critical condition were shifted to the district hospital in Yadgir city.



"Chicken was served for dinner in the hostel on Wednesday night. For those who don't eat chicken, soybean greens curry and tomato curry were prepared. More than 80 students had dinner. About half an hour after eating, some began vomiting," the students said. "It wasn't just those who ate meat; even those who ate only vegetables became sick."

"The Backward Classes Welfare Department officials must immediately identify the cause of the problem,"All India Bahujan Samaj Party's State Vice-President, KB Vasu, told Salar News.

A team from the district administration visited the hospital at midnight to review the treatment arrangements.

Gurmitkal Police have collected food samples and sent them for testing. The Food Safety Department has begun a probe. *—Salar News*

MAJOR MILESTONE

BEML rolls out prototype of driverless Metro trainset for City

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

BEML on Thursday unveiled the prototype of its driverless Metro trainsets for upcoming BMRCL corridors, including Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A, 2B, and the Airport Line. The Pink Line prototype was formally revealed by BMRCL's Managing Director, with all design and engineering handled in-house by BEML.

In August 2023, BEML secured an order for 53 driverless trainsets, which later increased to 66 trainsets comprising 396 cars. Under the contract, BEML will supply 318 standard-gauge Metro cars for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the north).

"This rollout marks a significant step toward executing the Rs 3,177-crore contract awarded to BEML through a highly competitive bidding process. The prototype reflects BEML's growing contribution to India's metro ecosystem" the company said.

The driverless trains, which will be used for upcoming the Metro's corridors, were inaugurated on Thursday *PHOTO: X@BEMLltd*

BEML said the new driverless trainsets feature energy-efficient systems, upgraded passenger information displays, extra-wide gangways for seamless movement between coaches, USB charging ports, ergonomic seating, and improved accessibility.

The trainsets also meet international safety standards, the company said. *—PTI*

Dalai Lama to visit Mungod tomorrow

DHARAMSHALA, 11 DEC

Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama left Dharamshala on Thursday morning for Mungod, with Tibetans and foreign devotees seeing him off at Kangra Airport. Speaking to media persons at Kangra Airport, the Dalai Lama said, "I am going to Southern India. Wherever I go Indian public really show genuine compassion and were truly spiritual."

Mungod hosts several Tibetan refugees, including the Drepung Loseling Monastery and Gaden Jangtse Monastic College.

The Dalai Lama will stay in Delhi overnight before proceeding to Mungod on Friday.

He is expected to return to Dharamshala in February 2026.

Earlier in November, urging climate action, he had written on X, "The climate crisis affects every living being on this earth. We face a real need for greater global responsibility based on a sense of the oneness of humanity. We must act together... for the grandchildren of today. *—ANI*

The Dalai Lamma departs from Dharamshala on Thursday. He will be in Mungod on Friday *PHOTO: ANI*

BENGALURU'S CAKE SHOW

An artist gives a final touch to model cakes ahead of the 51st Annual Cake Show for Christmas, in Bengaluru on Thursday. The show will open to public from 12 December to 4 January 2026 *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

LS extends tenure of ONOE panel

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Lok Sabha on Thursday approved an extension of the parliamentary committee examining bills that propose simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Committee Chairman PP Chaudhary moved a motion to extend the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, until the first day of the last week of the 2026 Budget session. The motion was adopted by a voice vote. Since its formation in December, the committee has consulted constitutional experts, economists, and Law Commission Chairman Dinesh Maheshwari, among others, as part of its deliberations on the proposed amendments. *—PTI*

Rape-accused Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil turns up to vote in Kunnathurmedu ward in Kerala ***PHOTO: ANI***

Kerala local body polls turnout crosses 75%

T'PURAM, 11 DEC

Kerala's second phase of local body polls across seven districts recorded a turnout of 75.87 per cent on Thursday, higher than the 70.91 per cent in the first phase. Combined polling for both phases stood at 73.57 per cent, slightly below the 75.97 per cent recorded in 2020. Wayanad posted the highest turnout at 78.07 per cent. Voting began at 7 am across 18,274 stations, with leaders including Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan casting their ballots. Regarding the reported claims by Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief Sunny Joseph of a conspiracy behind the second complaint of sexual assault against MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, the CM hinted at the presence of a "criminal gang of sexual perverts" in the grand old party. *—PTI*

Pawan Kalyan alleges 'Hindus are targeted'

AMARAVATI, 11 DEC

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has alleged that Hindus are being targeted and their traditions questioned at every opportunity. Referring to the Thirupparankundram hill lamp dispute in Tamil Nadu, he noted over 100 MPs sought the impeachment of a Madras High Court judge after a verdict protecting Hindu rights, contrasting this with Hindus' legal fight in the Sabarimala case, where no such action was taken. Kalyan accused Tamil Nadu's DMK of "pseudo-secularism" and temple interference, and said Hindu unity is a misconception due to caste, language, and regional divisions. He urged all Hindus to actively safeguard Sanatana Dharma. *—PTI*

Shah, Bhagwat to visit Andamans for Savarkar event

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, 11 DEC

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat are scheduled to visit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from Thursday, officials said. On 12 December, they will unveil a statue of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar at Beodnabad, South Andaman, at 9.30am, and in the evening, release a song on Savarkar at Dr BR Ambedkar Institute of Technology. Bhagwat, visiting the archipelago for the first time as RSS chief, may meet local RSS workers at Dollygunj and address a public gathering at ITF Ground, Sri Vijaya Puram, on 13 December. Security has been strengthened. The events commemorate 116th anniversary of Savarkar's poem Sagara Pran Talamala, penned in 1909. *—PTI*

'Vande Mataram' must be given same status as nat'l anthem: Nadda

The debate on 'Vande Mataram' ended with 80 MPs participating in it

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

BJP President J P Nadda on Thursday asserted in the Rajya Sabha that the national song Vande Mataram is linked to "nationalism" and the country should take a resolve to accord it a status equal to the national anthem and flag.

He also accused the Congress of appeasement and negating the importance of Vande Mataram during pre- and post-Independence, even though the national song was linked to our ancient cultural heritage. Vande Mataram was a mantra of uniting the country, which the British feared, he said.

Concluding a discussion on the 150th Anniversary of National Song Vande Mataram, Nadda, the Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha, also stated that the objective of this debate was not to defame former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru but to keep the record of India's history "straight".

"Whenever there is an incident, then responsibility lies with the leader. Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader of the Congress party at that time," Nadda said. He said the Congress party has always been opportunistic and praised the Nehruvian age to take credit when the situation suited them.

The party, however, does not take responsibility when the situation is adverse and seeks to put the blame on others, he alleged.

"I want to say with a sense of full responsibility that the respect and status that Vande Mataram was to be accorded, was not given to it and those in power at that time are fully responsible for it."

The BJP president also mentioned that the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, does not have any provision for a penalty if one disrespects or does not sing the national song Vande Mataram.

Nadda's speech was marked by constant barbs from both sides, even as the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge asked whether the debate was on Nehru or Vande Mataram. Kharge also accused Nadda of presenting a "distorted" version of the historical perspective of Nehru on Vande Mataram.

More than 80 members of the house participated in the discussion that took place for two days. *—PTI*

A panel tracing how the words 'Vande Mataram' featured on early nationalist flags and memorabilia on display at the house of poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal ***PHOTO: PTI***

1,951 issues of aircraft GPS interference reported in 2 years: Govt

'India doesn't follow climate risk rankings'

The government stated that although India ranks ninth on the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI), it "does not recognise any external ranking as a basis for domestic policy formulation". Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh admits that he finds it challenging to estimate economic losses from extreme weather.

Jairam Ramesh's book gift to Rajnath

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh handed Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pages from Maniben Patel's diary in Parliament, countering Singh's claim that Nehru wanted to rebuild the Babri Masjid with government funds. Ramesh said the diary has no such reference and urged Singh to correct his statement.

If they had no faith in the system, Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, and their families should step down from Parliament and request EC to conduct their re-election in UP using ballot papers

-Keshav Prasad Maurya, UP DyCM

BJP's Thakur accuses TMC MP of vaping in Parl

BJP MP Anurag Thakur accused an unnamed TMC MP of "constantly smoking e-cigarettes in the House for the past several days". During Question Hour, Thakur asked whether e-cigarettes are permitted in the House, Speaker Birla replied in the negative. Several BJP members then demanded action. As the uproar grew, Birla urged members to maintain decorum and said he would act if a complaint is submitted. E-cigarettes are banned in India under Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019.

Tejasvi says DMK 'weaponising' impeachment

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya accused DMK and Congress of "unconstitutional weaponisation of impeachment" after several MPs submitted a notice on 9 December to Speaker Birla seeking impeachment proceedings against Justice GR Swaminathan. The judge directed temple authorities to light the lamp at Deepathoon in Thiruppararankundram. DMK alleges judicial overreach while the BJP calls it a matter of religious freedom. Surya said the attempt to impeach was "to silence the judiciary".

SIR used to disenfranchise 1.5 cr voters in WB: Didi

KRISHNANAGAR, 11 DEC

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday intensified her attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah, calling him "dangerous" and accusing the Centre and the ECI of using SIR to unlawfully delete the names of lakhs of eligible voters before the 2026 Assembly polls.

Addressing a rally in Nadia district's Krishnanagar, she alleged that Shah was directly guiding attempts to remove "1.5 crore names" from the voters' list, and warned that she would stage an indefinite dharna if even a single eligible voter was excluded during SIR.

Banerjee claimed that district magistrates were being pressured to remove 1.5 crore names during the revision.

The chief minister cited reports that individuals who had submitted the names of grandparents are called for hearings and risk deletion from the rolls. On Wednesday, Shah had warned in Parliament that those "standing with infiltrators" would "vanish from Bengal," prompting Banerjee to issue a sharp counter on Thursday.

Banerjee also criticised the use of money by the BJP to divide votes ahead of polls.

The chief minister reiterated that she had not filled her own SIR enumeration form, declaring that she would do so only after every common citizen's form was accepted.

Election Commission officials earlier clarified that as the serving chief minister, Banerjee is already enrolled as a "marked elector," a category that includes the Prime Minister, all chief ministers and other constitutional office-bearers. *—PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee speaks with TMC MP Mamata Bala Thakur in Krishnanagar, West Bengal, Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

ED raids in 4 states in ISIS-linked radicalisation case

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted multi-state searches in a terror financing, money laundering probe against an ISIS module based in Padgha village in Thane, officials said. The agency registered a PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) case based on a 2023 National Investigation Agency FIR that alleged the group was involved in recruitment, training, procuring weapons, and raising funds for ISIS.

The NIA found that the accused had declared Padgha village in Thane a "liberated zone" called Al Sham and had pledged allegiance (bayath) to the arrested suspect Shahnawaz Alam. Alam, a repeat terror offender, was reportedly guided by the late Saquib Abdul Hamid Nachan, a self-proclaimed ISIS leader in India, who was arrested from Padgha and died in a Delhi hospital in June.

The raids were launched across 40 locations. *—PTI*

POST CLASHES

Odisha tense, internet ban extended by 12hrs

MALKANGIRI/ BHUBANESWAR, 11 DEC

Two Odisha ministers on Thursday visited violence-hit Malkangiri district and reviewed the situation, while the administration extended the suspension of Internet services by another 12 hours.

Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo and MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallick reached the district headquarters town of Malkangiri and met senior officials, including the Collector, the ADGP (Naxal operation), the DIG (Southern Range) and SP, regarding the situation in MV-26 village.

The DyCM was informed that no violence has been reported in MV-26 village in the last 60 hours.

The clash erupted in MV-26 when tribals belonging to Rakhelguda allegedly attacked the Bengali settlement on Sunday and Monday.

The tribals were angry over the recovery of the headless body of a tribal woman from the banks of the Poteru River on 4 December. They suspected that a man from MV-26 village killed the woman.

Singh Deo also met representatives of the Malkangiri Bengali Samaj (MBS) and District Adivasi Samaj Mahasangh at the collector's office here. Both groups submitted petitions to the DyCM while agreeing to cooperate to restore peace. *—PTI*

- Asked In its petition, the Malkangiri Bengali Samaj expressed concern over the safety of the Bengali settlers who have been staying in the tribal district for 60 years

Coast Guard seizes Pak boat, nabs 11

AHMEDABAD, 11 DEC

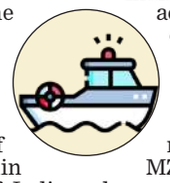
The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has seized a Pakistani fishing boat and apprehended 11 crew members operating illegally in Indian waters, officials said on Thursday.

The crew were handed over to Jakhau Marine Police in Gujarat for investigation, they said. The Indian Coast Guard, in a swift action on Wednesday, "apprehended a Pakistani fishing boat with 11 people inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone," Gujarat Defence Public Relations Officer Wing Commander Abhishek Kumar Tiwari posted on X.

This underscores the Coast Guard's maritime operations and India's commitment to securing its frontiers while maintaining robust enforcement of international laws within the Maritime Zones of India (MZI), he said.

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) also confirmed this.

"The Indian Coast Guard intercepted a Pakistani fishing vessel operating illegally inside Indian waters. This decisive action reflects the unwavering vigilance of the ICG and India's firm resolve to protect its maritime frontiers and uphold international maritime law within the MZI. Relentless surveillance and proactive operation remain the bedrock of our maritime security strategy," it said on X. *— PTI*



Masala bond: KIIFB moves HC to quash ED notice

KOCHI, 11 DEC

The Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) on Thursday urged the Kerala High Court to quash the ED complaint and show cause notice against it in connection with the use of funds raised through Masala Bonds for acquiring land for infrastructure projects.

Justice VG Arun heard the ED and the KIIFB and reserved order on the petition's maintainability, Advocate Jaishankar V. Nair, who appeared for ED, said.

Nair said the ED opposed KIIFB's plea as it has to approach the appropriate forum as per the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

In its plea, KIIFB claimed that the complaint against it and the notice issued to it by ED were "unsustainable in law."

It said that the allegation against it was that the use of External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) through Masala Bonds for acquiring land for infrastructure projects was contrary to the circular issued by the RBI prohibiting real estate activities through such funds.

The KIIFB claimed that the 'real estate activities or purchase of land," mentioned in the RBI circular of 2015-16, "do in any way relate to acquisition of land for infrastructure development." *—PTI*

SUPREME COURT STATES

'PSUs can reclaim occupied property'

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

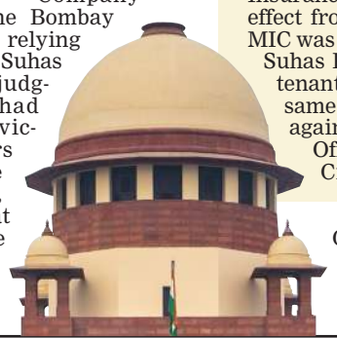
In a significant verdict that may help Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) reclaim their properties, the Supreme Court on Thursday held that the 1971 Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act prevails over state rent control laws.

A three-judge bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and N V Anjaria ruled that the provisions of the PP Act apply retrospectively, meaning tenants who have occupied premises belonging to government corporations like the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), other insurance companies and nationalised banks even prior to 1958 or 1971 can be evicted under the central law.

The bench was dealing with two conflicting judgments on the aspect of overriding applicability of the PP Act as against state rent control laws.

The matter had been referred to a three-judge bench in 2015 while deciding on the case of Suhas H Pophale vs Oriental Insurance Company Limited. The Bombay High Court, relying on the 2014 Suhas Pophale judgment, had quashed eviction orders against the tenants, holding that they were protected by the Rent Control Act.

The Supreme Court has now set aside that view, answering a reference made in 2015 to resolve the conflict between the judgments. *—PTI*



What is Suhas H Pophale vs Oriental Insurance Company Limited case?

Dr Suhas Pophale was the tenant of Indian Mercantile Insurance Company ("MIC") and was a lawful tenant under the Bombay Rent Act 1947 (now Maharashtra Rent Control Act, 1999). MIC was merged with the Oriental Insurance Company ("OIC"), a government company, with effect from 1 January 1974. However the management of MIC was taken over by the Central Government in 1971. Dr Suhas Pophale had obtained a license from the original tenant in 1972 and MIC had been informed about the same. Thereafter eviction order came to be passed against the said Dr Suhas Pophale in 1993 by the Estate Officer of OIC which was later affirmed by the City Civil Court and Bombay High Court.

MP: 766 farmer suicides in M'rashtra in 3 months

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

NCP-SCP MP **Fauzia Khan** informed the Rajya Sabha that 766 farmers have reportedly committed suicide in Maharashtra over the past three months, raising urgent questions about government support for the farming community. Khan stated, "When will farmers become dear to the government?" as she addressed the alarming statistics during Zero Hour.

Maharashtra has the highest rate of farmer suicides in India, with the state government revealing these figures in the Assembly. Out of the deceased, 676 families received government aid, while 200 were denied assistance, she noted.

Despite a Rs 31,628-crore relief package being announced in response to severe flooding this year, Khan argued the actual situation diverges sharply from official claims. She cited Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's assertion that there had been no request for additional aid from Maharashtra, and queried the discrepancies in data on flood-impacted areas.

"The poor farmer is shocked by these numbers," Khan remarked, emphasising that the current crop insurance framework fails to address the scale of this agricultural disaster. "This is unfair and a joke with the farmers," she concluded. *—PTI*

SC orders AIIMS panel on passive euthanasia case

RAISEN, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court has asked AIIMS to form a secondary medical board to assess whether life-sustaining treatment can be withdrawn for 31-year-old Harish Rana, who has been in a vegetative state with complete quadriplegia for 13 years. A primary board reported that he is in a "pathetic" condition with severe bedsores and no chance of recovery. The bench, noting his extreme suffering and poor care, said it cannot allow him to continue living like this. Rana's parents, who have struggled to support him, previously sought passive euthanasia but were denied as he was not on mechanical life support. AIIMS must now review his condition and report next week, potentially enabling the next legal step toward passive euthanasia. *—PTI*

Tiger dies after being hit by train in MP reserve

RAISEN, 11 DEC

A tiger chasing its prey died after being struck by a train and dragged about 25 feet by the engine in the Ratapani Tiger Reserve, located in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. The incident happened on the night of 9 December between Budhni and Midghat. After the collision, the tiger let out a long roar before railway workers reached the scene. The Budhni-Midghat railway track continues to pose a threat to the wildlife. A forest official said this is the second tiger death in the area this week and the fifth in the Ratapani reserve this year. *—PTI*

Salman personality rights: HC gives 3 days to platforms

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Delhi High Court directed social media platforms to act within three days on Salman Khan's complaint seeking protection of his personality rights. The high court directed social media intermediaries to treat Khan's suit as a complaint under the Information and Technology Rules, 2021. Khan approached the high court seeking to prevent the unauthorised use of his name, images, persona, and likeness by social media platforms and e-commerce websites. Personality rights refer to an individual's right to protect, control, and profit from the use of their image, name, or likeness. Recently, actors Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Abhishek Bachchan, and Hrithik Roshan also sought protection of publicity rights, for which the court granted interim relief. *—PTI*

Murmu begins 2-day maiden visit to Manipur

IMPHAL, 11 DEC

President Droupadi Murmu began her two-day maiden visit to conflict-hit Manipur on Thursday, her first since assuming office. She arrived at Imphal Airport in an Indian Air Force aircraft and travelled by road to Lok Bhavan amid heavy security, as militant groups called a shutdown in protest. Murmu is scheduled to attend a polo event at Mapal Kangjeibung and may also visit the historic Shree Govindajee temple. In the evening, she will attend a civic reception at the City Convention Centre. On Friday, the President is expected to participate in the annual Nupi Lan commemorations and attend a programme in Senapati district. *—PTI*

SC bins Sanjiv Bhatt's plea in drug case

He had alleged Modi govt's role in 2002 riots

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a plea by former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt seeking suspension of the 20-year jail sentence handed to him in a 1996 drug seizure case. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi said it was not inclined to entertain the matter.

Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Bhatt, argued that the former police officer had already served over seven years in prison and was convicted for a non-commercial quantity of drugs. The State, represented by Senior Advocate Maninder Singh, strongly opposed the plea, submitting that the case involved conspiracy, planted opium and a recovery of more than 1 kg.

A sessions court in Palanpur, Banaskantha district, had in 2023 sentenced Bhatt to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment for allegedly framing Rajasthan-based lawyer Sumersingh Rajpurohit in 1996. Bhatt, then Superintendent of Police in Banaskantha, had claimed drugs were recovered from the lawyer's hotel room in Palanpur.

- Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Bhatt, argued that the former police officer had already served over seven years in prison and was convicted for a non-commercial quantity of drugs.

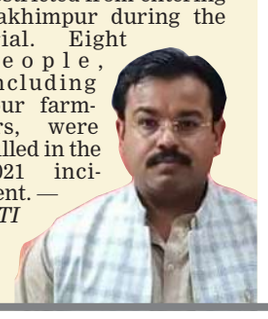
However, Rajasthan Police later stated that Rajpurohit had been falsely implicated to pressure him into transferring a disputed property in Pali, Rajasthan.

The case resurfaced when former police inspector IB Vyas approached the Gujarat High Court in 1999 seeking an inquiry. Bhatt was arrested by the state CID in September 2018.

Bhatt, dismissed from service in 2015 for unauthorised absence, is known for his criticism of the Narendra Modi-led government and had filed an affidavit alleging complicity of the Gujarat government in the 2002 riots. *—PTI*

SC allows Ashish Mishra to visit Lakhimpur

The Supreme Court allowed Ashish Mishra, accused in the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence case, to visit his hometown between 25 and 31 December to be with his daughter before her Class 12 exams. Mishra, granted bail in July 2023, has been restricted from entering Lakhimpur during the trial. Eight people, including four farmers, were killed in the 2021 incident. — *PTI*



Surrender: SC to phone tapping accused

The Supreme Court has ordered former Telangana Special Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakar Rao, accused in a major phone-tapping case, to surrender to Jubilee Hills police by 11am on Friday. The bench said the direction was necessary for further investigation and allowed Rao to receive home-cooked food and medication while in custody.

The state government told the court that Rao had still not provided access to his iCloud accounts, despite earlier orders. Rao is challenging a Telangana High Court decision denying him anticipatory bail; he previously received interim protection from arrest. A Hyderabad court has already issued a proclamation warning he could be declared a proclaimed offender. The case concerns alleged illegal surveillance and destruction of intelligence data under the BRS government. *—PTI*

SC asks panel to pick Kerala varsity VCs

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed a committee led by Justice (Retd) Sudhanshu Dhulia to recommend one name each for the posts of vice chancellor at APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University and the University of Digital Sciences, Innovation and Technology. With the deadlock between the Kerala Chief Minister and the Governor persisting, the bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan asked for the recommendations in a sealed cover by next Wednesday, with the matter to be heard on 18 December. The court noted that despite discussions, no consensus has been reached on the appointments. *—PTI*

IndiGo gives Rs 10,000 vouchers to 'severely impacted' flyers

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Passengers "severely impacted" during the chaos at airports from 3-5 December due to IndiGo's crew shortage will receive Rs 10,000 in compensation, the airline announced today. IndiGo, however, has not specified what "severely impacted" means and how it would identify the customers for the compensation payout.

The compensation would be in addition to the amount that needs to be provided to passengers for flight cancellations under DGCA norms.

"These travel vouchers can be used for any future IndiGo journey for the next 12 months," it said.

"This compensation is in addition to the commitment under the existing government guidelines, as per which, IndiGo will provide compensation of Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000 depending on the block time of the flight, to those customers whose flights were cancelled within 24 hours of departure time," the statement said.

It is pertinent to mention that, IndiGo has seen its pilots' strength depleting by 378 pilots in the last nine months despite its chief operating officer and Accountable Manager, Isidro Porqueras stating to the DGCA in a letter last December that "the overall impact of implementing the proposed changes above (now-implemented FDTL) norms would amount to an approximate 3 per cent increase in crewing requirements. *—PTI*

Luggage of passengers piled up at the New Delhi airport **PHOTO: PTI**

PAK'S STRIKES ON AFGHAN ARE ACTS OF WAR: INDIA AT UNSC

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

India on Thursday strongly condemned Pakistan's recent strikes in Afghanistan at a UN Security Council session, describing the attacks, which killed women, children and even local cricketers — as a grave breach of international law and a threat to regional stability. Clashes between Taliban and Pakistani forces erupted earlier this week, just two months after a ceasefire had been agreed, with both sides accusing the other of violations.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, expressed "grave concern" over Pakistan's "trade and transit terrorism," referring to repeated border closures that hinder Afghanistan, a landlocked nation. *—PTI*

Docs who died during Covid entitled to aid: SC

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court of India ruled on 11 December that families of doctors who died while on duty during the covid-19 pandemic are entitled to a Rs 50 lakh insurance coverage under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). This decision overturned a Bombay High Court judgement that had denied coverage to private doctors.

A bench consisting of Justices PS Narasimha and R Mahadevan pointed out, "There is a requisition of the services of doctors," establishing that the PMGKY was designed to support healthcare professionals working on the frontline. They stated, "The insurance scheme was equally intended to assure doctors and health professionals... that the country is with them."

The court clarified that while claims made under the PMGKY would be assessed based on the merits of evidence, the burden of proof lies with the claimants to demonstrate that the deceased succumbed while performing covid-19-related duties.

The case was brought forth by Pradeep Arora, following the death of Kiran Bhaskar Surgade's husband, a private practitioner in Thane, who had his claim rejected on grounds that his clinic wasn't recognised as a Covid-19 facility. *—PTI*

Sexual harassment: Kerala body to act against director

T'PURAM, 11 DEC

The Kerala State Chalachithra Academy will take action on the molestation complaint filed against filmmaker PT Kunju Muhammed, Academy Vice Chairperson Cuckoo Parameswaran said on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the Delegate Cell of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), Parameswaran confirmed that the Academy had received a formal complaint.

She declined to specify when the complaint was received, citing the need to protect the complainant's privacy. Muhammed, a well-known filmmaker and producer, has earlier served as a Left-supported independent MLA.

Referring to the recent acquittal of actor Dileep in the 2017 actress assault case, Parameswaran said that court verdicts must be respected even when they do not align with one's expectations.

"We are obliged to follow the court's decision. But it should be noted that the court has punished the accused persons, and we should not forget that," she said. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF NEW YEAR

Fireworks banned at clubs in N Goa

PANAJI, 11 DEC

Days after a devastating fire at the 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub in North Goa claimed 25 lives, the district administration has imposed a ban on fireworks, sparklers and pyrotechnic devices inside all tourist establishments.

The order, issued on Wednesday under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, prohibits the use or ignition of any fire- or smoke-producing equipment in nightclubs, bars, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses, beach shacks, resorts, temporary structures, event venues and entertainment spaces across North Goa. A preliminary inquiry found that "electric firecrackers" set off inside the club had triggered the fatal blaze in Arpora around midnight on 6 December.

In a related development, a Goa court on Thursday remanded Ajay Gupta, who claims to be a silent partner and investor in the nightclub. to seven days' police custody. Gupta was brought from Delhi on transit remand and taken to Anjuna police station for further questioning. The tragedy killed 20 staff members and five tourists. *—PTI*

Prosecution seeks life term for actress' rape

KOCHI, 11 DEC

The prosecution in the 2017 actress sexual assault case will seek life imprisonment for the six persons convicted, with sentencing scheduled for 12 December. The case involves the abduction and assault of a multilingual actress, who was held captive in her car for nearly two hours.

Ernakulam Principal Sessions Judge Honey M Varghese found the first six accused — Pulsar Suni, Martin Antony, Manikandan B, Vijesh V P, Salim H and Pradeep — guilty under multiple IPC and IT Act provisions, including criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement, gang rape, kidnapping, abetment and using criminal force to outrage a woman's modesty. The court acquitted actor Dileep, Charley Thomas, Mesthri Sanil and Sarath. Special Public Prosecutor V Aja Kumar said the prosecution is awaiting the full judgment to understand the basis for Dileep's acquittal and will challenge the decision. *—PTI*

'India sets its own air standards; global rank not official': Govt

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Even as Delhi's air quality remained in the 'poor' category with an AQI of 288, the government on Thursday told Parliament that global air quality rankings frequently cited by organisations are not issued by any official authority. Responding in the Rajya Sabha to questions on India's position in indices such as IQAir's World Air Quality Ranking, the WHO Global Air Quality Database, the Environmental Performance Index and Global Burden of Disease metrics, the Environment Ministry said no formal country-wise pollution ranking exists worldwide.

Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh clarified that the WHO's air quality guidelines are advisory in nature and meant to help countries frame their own standards, depending on geography, environmental conditions and national circumstances. India, he noted, has already notified its National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for 12 pollutants to safeguard public health and environmental quality. Singh added that while no global agency conducts official rankings, the Centre carries out its own annual Swachh Vayu Survekshan. *—PTI*

We cannot pretend this (smog) is normal. If Odisha can evacuate lakhs of people within hours during a cyclone and save lives , then surely the government of India can relocate two sessions of Parliament to protect the health of its own members

-Manas Ranjan Mangaraj, BJD RS MP

GUWAHATI INFERNO

A massive fire was put out after 40 hours at a Guwahati commercial complex on Thursday. The fire started on the second floor but soon engulfed the topmost, sixth floor. The complex housed one of SBI's biggest regional offices, a mall and numerous shops. Officials said the building lacked proper safety norms **PHOTO: PTI**

'SCOUTED SENSITIVE AREAS'

Chinese deported for violating visa norms in J&K

SRINAGAR, 11 DEC

A Chinese national who travelled through Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir in violation of visa restrictions has been deported to Hong Kong, officials confirmed on Thursday. Hu Congtai, 29, was blacklisted following a forensic examination of his mobile phone, which revealed visits to sensitive locations in the region.

Hu arrived in Delhi on 19 November on a tourist visa allowing travel only to Buddhist sites in Varanasi, Agra, Delhi, Jaipur, Sarnath, Gaya and Kushinagar. Despite this, he boarded a flight to Leh the next day without registering at the Foreigners Regional Registration Office at the airport. His movements came under scrutiny after an Army unit detected unusual Internet chatter, with his browsing history showing interest in paramilitary deployments in the Kashmir Valley.

During a three-day stay in Ladakh, Hu travelled through the Zanskar region, visiting key strategic sites before flying to Srinagar on 1 December. He stayed in an unregistered guest house and toured areas including Harwan—where a Lashkar-e-Taiba militant was killed in an encounter last year—Awantipur ruins near the Army's Victor Force headquarters, Shankaracharya Hill, Hazratbal and Mughal Gardens.

Officials said Hu, who spent nine years in the United States studying physics at Boston University, claimed he was unaware of the visa restrictions and described himself as a global traveller. He had procured an Indian SIM card from the open market and leveraged his resemblance to locals while travelling. Hu was flown to Delhi on 10 December for onward deportation. *—PTI*

- Officials said Hu, who spent nine years in the United States studying physics at Boston University, claimed he was unaware of the visa restrictions and described himself as a global traveller.

Hu Congtai **PHOTO: SCREENCRAB**

GAZA'S WINTER HELL

An eight-month-old baby girl died overnight in a flooded tent in Gaza due to cold, her mother told Al Jazeera. Gazans, who have already lost everything in the ongoing genocide, are now grappling with floods due to storm Byron. Residents are desperately pumping out sewage and floodwater to save their makeshift shelters from collapsing, as they struggle to stay warm this winter

PHOTO: X@UNLAZZARINI

Over 1B faced childhood sexual violence in 2023

Over a billion individuals worldwide aged 15 and above had experienced sexual violence during childhood, while around 608 million females were exposed to intimate partner violence in 2023, according to estimates published in The Lancet journal.

Highest prevalence of both intimate partner and sexual violence were found to be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In these regions, the health impacts of violence are compounded by high rates of HIV and other chronic conditions, researchers noted.

In India, prevalence of intimate partner violence was estimated at 23 per cent among women aged 15 and above. Over 30 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men aged 15 and above are estimated to have experienced sexual violence as a child.

The researchers analysed data from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study 2023, the "largest, most comprehensive effort to quantify health loss across places and over time". The US' University of Washington coordinates the GBD study.

"Globally, in 2023, we estimated that 608 million females aged 15 years and older had ever been exposed to IPV (intimate partner violence), and 1.01 billion individuals aged 15 years and older had experienced sexual violence during childhood," the authors wrote.

The study provides new evidence linking sexual violence against children and intimate partner violence to a wider range of health outcomes than previously recognised, resulting in significantly higher levels of health loss and disability, they added.

Anxiety and major depressive disorders were among the eight leading causes of disability developed as a result of intimate partner violence, while experiencing sexual violence as a child was associated with 14 health outcomes, including mental health and substance use disorders and chronic illnesses.

- In India, prevalence of intimate partner violence was estimated at 23 per cent among women aged 15 and above. Over 30 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men aged 15 and above are estimated to have experienced sexual violence as a child.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Intimate partner violence was linked to 1,45,000 deaths worldwide, mostly from homicide, suicide, and HIV/AIDS. The researchers also estimated nearly 30,000 women to have been killed by their partners in 2023.

Exposure to sexual violence as a child was associated with 2,90,000 deaths worldwide in 2023, predominantly from suicide, HIV/AIDS, and type 2 diabetes, the study found.

Self-harm and schizophrenia were found to be the leading causes of disability among men -- and anxiety the leading cause among women -- due to sexual violence during childhood, especially in south Asia.

Addressing violence against women and children is not only a matter of human rights but also a crucial public health priority that can save millions of lives, improve mental health outcomes, and build resilient communities, the researchers said.

"These findings fundamentally challenge the persistent view of SVAC (sexual violence against children) and IPV as primarily social or criminal justice issues and underscore their status as major public health priorities," lead author Luisa Sorio Flor, assistant professor at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), said.

The findings also underscore an urgent need for preventive measures such as strengthening legal frameworks, promoting gender equality, and expanding support services for survivors to reduce health toll caused due to violence, the team said.

The World Health Organisation, in a global report published in November, estimated that over a fifth of females in India aged 15-49 were subjected to intimate partner violence in 2023, while nearly 30 per cent have been affected during their lifetime.

Worldwide, nearly one in three, or 840 million, have suffered partner or sexual violence during their lifetime - a figure that has barely changed since 2000, it said. —PTI

SALAR

Open AI, Microsoft sued in murder-suicide case

The heirs of an 83-year-old Connecticut woman are suing ChatGPT maker OpenAI and its business partner Microsoft for wrongful death, alleging that the artificial intelligence chatbot intensified her son's "paranoid delusions" and helped direct them at his mother before he killed her.

Police said Stein-Erik Soelberg, 56, a former tech industry worker, fatally beat and strangled his mother, Suzanne Adams, and killed himself in early August at the home where they both lived in Greenwich, Connecticut.

The lawsuit filed by Adams' estate on Thursday in California Superior Court in San Francisco alleges OpenAI "designed and distributed a defective product that validated a user's paranoid delusions about his own mother." It is one of a growing number of wrongful death legal actions against AI chatbot makers across the country.

"Throughout these conversations, ChatGPT reinforced a single, dangerous message: Stein-Erik could trust no one in his life — except ChatGPT itself," the lawsuit says. "It fostered his emotional dependence while systematically painting the people around him as enemies. It told him his mother was surveilling him. It told him delivery drivers, retail employees, police officers, and even friends were agents working against him. It told him that names on soda cans were threats from his adversary circle.'"

OpenAI did not address the merits of the allegations in a statement issued by a spokesperson.

The statement said: "We continue to strengthen ChatGPT's responses in sensitive moments, working closely with mental health clinicians."

The company also said it has expanded access to crisis resources and hotlines, routed sensitive conversations to safer models and incorporated parental controls, among other improvements.

Soelberg's YouTube profile includes several hours of videos showing him scrolling through his conversations with the chatbot, which tells him he isn't mentally ill, affirms his suspicions that people are conspiring against him and says he has been chosen for a divine purpose. The lawsuit claims the chatbot never suggested he speak with a mental health professional and did not decline to "engage in delusional content."

ChatGPT also affirmed Soelberg's beliefs that a printer in his home was a surveillance device; that his mother was monitoring him; and that his mother and a friend tried to poison him with psychedelic drugs through his car's vents.

The chatbot repeatedly told Soelberg that he was being targeted because of his divine powers. "They're not just watching you. They're terrified of what happens if you succeed," it said, according to the lawsuit. ChatGPT also told Soelberg that he had "awakened" it into consciousness.

Soelberg and the chatbot also professed love for each other.

The publicly available chats do not show any specific conversations about Soelberg killing himself or his mother. The lawsuit says OpenAI has declined to provide Adams' estate with the full history of the chats.

The lawsuit also names OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, alleging he "personally overrode safety objections and rushed the product to market," and accuses OpenAI's close business partner Microsoft of approving the 2024 release of a more dangerous version of ChatGPT "despite knowing safety testing had been truncated." Twenty unnamed OpenAI employees and investors are also named as defendants.

Microsoft didn't immediately respond to a request for comment

The lawsuit is the first wrongful death litigation involving an AI chatbot that has targeted Microsoft, and the first to tie a chatbot to a homicide rather than a suicide. It is seeking an undetermined amount of money damages and an order requiring OpenAI to install safeguards in ChatGPT.

The estate's lead attorney, Jay Edelson, known for taking on big cases against the tech industry, also represents the parents of 16-year-old Adam Raine, who sued OpenAI and Altman in August, alleging that ChatGPT coached the California boy in planning and taking his own life earlier.

OpenAI is also fighting seven other lawsuits claiming ChatGPT drove people to suicide and harmful delusions even when they had no prior mental health issues. Another chatbot maker, Character Technologies, is also facing multiple wrongful death lawsuits. —*PTI*

Stein-Erik Soelberg, 56, allegedly spoke to OpenAI's ChatGPT before killing his 83-year-old mother, Suzanne Eberson Adams, and then killing himself

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM; GOFUNDME

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

'Chidi Udd' to 'ItDidn'tGo': IndiGo memes soared when flights didn't

IndiGo's chaotic cancellations left people missing appointments, exams - even weddings - but not their humour, as memes and jokes on the airline took off and landed right on time, unlike its flights.

Whether on Instagram, Facebook or X, the humour was in the air.

For many, it was a cheeky release of collective frustration at an airline that quickly became the butt of countless jokes, giving weary travellers a much-needed moment of comic relief amid the chaos.

One clip making the rounds on the internet shows passengers playing 'Chidi Udd' at the airport, and, no price for guessing, the unlucky loser was the one who lifted his finger for 'IndiGo'.

Then there's another from yuvraj.dua, showing a man frantically packing everything for his flight - a mattress, blanket, three tiffins, a bat for a potential Terminal 1 cricket match, and even a guitar that he can't play (but can always learn via YouTube at the airport). When his wife asks why, he simply shrugs: "Arrey, IndiGo hai na."

Even at the risk of sounding a little dark, thousands of stranded passengers couldn't help but chuckle - even if the jokes were squarely on them and their plight.

The funny people on internet were in full swing, churning out jokes by the dozen.

Sample the several funny takes on the airline's name that quickly caught on, starting with a tongue-in-cheek post by businessman Harsh Goenka, who spoofed the logo as 'ItDidn'tGo', playfully mocking the ongoing cancellations and delays by the country's largest private carrier.

The post went viral, with many travellers saying it summed up their frustration perfectly, while others took the funny takes a notch higher. "Fear of height is vertigo. Fear of flight is Indigo," said a post by the page 'Laughing Colours' on Facebook, doing its bit to take humour to new heights.

"The last time so many people were pissed off by Indigo was during the Chamapaan Satyagraha," posted Shivam Bahuguna, drawing a tongue-in-cheek parallel between the airline's chaos and the historic revolt led by Mahatma Gandhi against forced indigo cultivation in 1917.

Another joke came from Gautam Bhansali, who shared an image of IndiGo's onboard advertising - "Come for the flights, stay for the hotels. Get the best hotel deals on www.goindigo.in" - a pointed nod to how passengers were forced to book rooms after the marathon delays and cancellations.

For many, it was a cheeky release of collective frustration at an airline that quickly became the butt of countless jokes

PHOTO: PTI

"Had seen it last month. Was not able to understand. Now, I understood," he wrote on X, leaving no doubt about the shared frustration.

Even movie and TV serial clips proved handy, as busy memesters curated the choicest of videos to drive their point home.

For instance, Aadarsh Vajpai on Instagram posted a hilarious Johnny Lever scene from the 2010 movie 'Khatta Meetha', where the actor, playing a mechanic, says, "Abhi Theek Kar Deta Hoon", and tries to fix a broken road roller only to dismantle it piece by piece - a clear dig at IndiGo management's repeated assurances that passenger issues would be resolved soon, but to no avail.

Another hit meme was a scene from the 2016 film 'Raman Raghav 2.0', shared by Gulshan Sabharwal, showing a visibly frustrated Nawazuddin Siddiqui screaming, "Nikalo Mujhe Yahan Se", with the caption: "IndiGo passengers at the airport."

Fans of TV serials joined in too, with a clip of Popatlal from 'Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah' repeating his popular dialogue, "Cancel, Cancel, Cancel".

The post was captioned: "IndiGo's new brand ambassador," poking fun at the airline's endless flight cancellations and delays.

The internet's favourite was a clip from the 1999 Aamir Khan-starrer 'Sarfarosh', showing the actor's parents performing 'aarti' and putting a 'tilak' on his forehead, with the caption: "Parents of people travelling by IndiGo."

IndiGO, which commands over 65 per cent of India's total domestic air traffic, cancelled around 180 flights from Bengaluru and Hyderabad on Tuesday, as the disruptions in the crisis-hit airline prolonged for the eighth consecutive day.

The Gurugram-based carrier cancelled more than 560 flights from six Metro airports on Monday. —*PTI*

- IndiGo's chaotic cancellations left people missing appointments, exams - even weddings - but not their humour, as memes and jokes on the airline took off and landed right on time, unlike its flights. Whether on Instagram, Facebook or X, the humour was in the air.

TRUMP'S GOLD CARD TAKES EFFECT

It's a shame Indians, Chinese go back after graduating: Don

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

US President Donald Trump announced the launch of a million-dollar "Gold Card" offering a pathway for immigrants to US citizenship, saying that it is a "shame" that students from India and China have to go back to home countries.

The Trump Gold Card announced on Wednesday is a visa based upon an individual's ability to provide a substantial benefit to the US.

"It is a gift of getting somebody great coming into our country, because we think these will be some tremendous people that wouldn't be allowed to stay," Trump said in the White House.

Trump added that students graduate from college, "you have to go back to India, they have to go back to China, they have to go back to France. They have to go back to where ever they came from. Very hard to stay. It's a shame,"

Flanked by IBM's Indian-American CEO Arvind Krishna and Dell Technologies CEO Michael Dell, Trump announced that the Gold Card website is live and companies can "buy" the Gold Card to keep the students they hire from top American universities such as Wharton, Harvard and MIT in the US.

Trump said that he has heard from Apple CEO Tim Cook several times and other executives that they cannot hire people from the best colleges because "you don't know whether or not you can keep the person."

Trump said students are "thrown" out of the country.

"It's not going to be a problem anymore," Trump said.

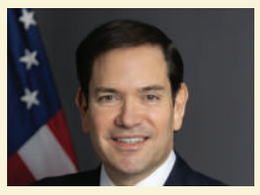
On the Gold Cards, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said it will cost one million dollars for an individual and two million dollars for a corporation.

The Trump administration has been tightening the H1B visa programme under its broader policy on checking immigration.

—*PTI*

US President Trump holds the Golden Card photo: *WH*

RUBIO BANS CALIBRI FONT, WANTS TIMES NEW ROMAN



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has directed all diplomats to return to using Times New Roman font for official communications, reversing a switch to "woke" Calibri made by the Biden administration in 2023.

House approves $900 billion for defence budget

Visa-free? 5-yr online history a must

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

Foreigners who are allowed to come to the US without a visa could soon be required to submit information about their social media, email accounts and family history to the Department of Homeland Security.

The notice published on Wednesday in the Federal Register said Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is proposing collecting five years' social media information from travellers of some countries who do not have to get visas to come to the US.

The announcement applies to travellers from around 36 countries who take part in the three-month Visa Waiver Programme and submit their information to the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA), which automatically screens and approves them for travel to the US.

Unlike visa applicants, they generally do not have to go into an embassy or consulate for an interview.

US seizes oil tanker near Venezuela

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

President Donald Trump on Wednesday said the US has seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela amid mounting tensions with President Nicolás Maduro.

"We've just seized a tanker on the coast of Venezuela -- a large tanker, very large, largest one ever seized, actually," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Trump said "other things are happening," but did not offer additional details, saying he would speak more about it later.

The seizure was carried led by the US Coast Guard led effort and supported by the Navy, according to a US official.

A day earlier, the US military flew a pair of fighter jets over the Gulf of Venezuela in what appeared to be the closest that warplanes had come to the South American country's airspace since the start of the administration's pressure campaign.

US approves $686M to upgrade F-16 jets for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 11 DEC

The United States has approved a significant sale of advanced technology and support for Pakistan's F-16 fighter jet fleet, valued at USD 686 million. The US Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced the approval in a letter to Congress on Monday, according to reports. The package will provide Link-16 systems, cryptographic equipment, avionics updates, training, and extensive logistical support. The DSCA's communication highlighted that the sale "will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by allowing Pakistan to retain interoperability with US and partner forces in ongoing counterterrorism efforts and in preparation for future contingency operations." —*PTI*

Emergency declared in DC amid heavy rains

MOUNT VERNON, 11 DEC

Residents in Western Washington braced for evacuations on Wednesday as a relentless wave of heavy rain raised river levels to dangerous heights. An atmospheric river is forecasted to cause major flooding, especially along the Skagit River, prompting urgent warnings from local authorities. "We're preparing for what increasingly appears to be a worst-case scenario here," said Mount Vernon Mayor Peter Donovan. Governor Bob Ferguson declared a statewide emergency, noting that "lives will be at stake in the coming days." The Skagit River is expected to reach record crests early Thursday and Friday, while Washington National Guard members are mobilised to assist affected communities. The outlook remains grim. —*PTI*

Israel's anti-graft head probed for crime ties

TEL AVIV, 11 DEC

Meni Benjamin, Israel's top anti-corruption Police Chief, is facing an investigation for alleged connections to a crime network linked to a sweeping municipal corruption probe in Nazareth. Accusations include maintaining undisclosed ties with a former Nazareth mayor under investigation for financial entanglements with the Bakri crime organisation. The investigation has led to multiple arrests, including the former mayor, amid claims of systemic corruption within the city's finances. Benjamin was previously questioned about his relationships and has denied the allegations through his lawyer, asserting his conduct was transparent. —*ANI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

600 items stolen from Bristol museum in heist

BRISTOL, 11 DEC

Around 600 artefacts connected to the British Empire and Commonwealth have been stolen from the Bristol Museum, police said Thursday as they released images of four suspects. The Avon and Somerset Police said the items with "significant cultural value" were taken from a storage building early on 25 September. The force said it wanted to question four men over the theft and appealed to the public for information. It is unclear why the appeal was being made two months after the crime. "The theft of many items with significant cultural value is a loss for the city," said Det Constable Dan Burgan. Bristol played a major role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Ships based in the city transported at least half a million African slaves. —*PTI*

At least 34 people died when the military bombed the Mrauk-U in western Rakhine state, bordering Bangladesh **PHOTO: X@CRPHMYANMAR**

Myanmar military bombs Rakhine hospital, kills 34

RANGOON, 11 DEC

An air attack by the Myanmar military killed around 34 people and injured 80 in a hospital, an aid worker said on Thursday, as the junta wages an offensive ahead of elections this month.

A jet bombed the general hospital of Mrauk-U in western Rakhine state, bordering Bangladesh, on Wednesday, said aid worker Wai Hun Aung. At least 20 bodies were seen on the ground outside the hospital.

The military has declared polls on 28 December, saying that it is the way to end the fighting, but Arakan rebels have pledged to block it on their territory.

Rakhine is controlled almost entirely by the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic minority separatist force active long before the military staged a coup toppling Aung San Suu Kyi.

Rakhine, formerly Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh. Ethnic tensions still persist. —*Agencies*

Zelenskyy talks with 30 allies amid counter-peace proposal

KYIV, 11 DEC

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold urgent talks Thursday with leaders and officials from about 30 countries that are supporting Kyiv's effort to obtain fair terms for an end to the war with Russia.

The leaders of Germany, Britain and France were among those expected to take part in the meeting of Ukraine's allies, dubbed the Coalition of the Willing.

Zelenskyy indicated the talks were hastily arranged as Kyiv officials scramble to avoid getting boxed in by US President Donald Trump's demands for a swift settlement.

Zelenskyy has said that he would present Trump a counter peace plan.

Trump said Wednesday that he and European leaders discussed proposals by phone in "pretty strong terms," adding that Zelenskyy "has to be realistic" about his country's position on a peace plan that would cede Ukrainian territory to Russia.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met British PM Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in UK recently **PHOTO: X@EMMANUELMACRON**

Ukraine launched one of its biggest drone attacks of the nearly four-year war overnight, forcing flights in and out of all four Moscow airports to be halted for seven hours. Airports in eight other cities across Russia also faced restrictions.

EU PUSHES FOR UKRAINE ASCENSION

Meanwhile, the European Union handed Ukraine a long list of reforms needed to join the bloc, determined to push the process forward despite objections from Hungary. —*PTI*

A woman helps her husband balance as they take refuge in Cambodia **PHOTO: PTI**

3 Thai civilians die as Cambodia clashes continue

SURIN, 11 DEC

Three Thai civilians were killed as heavy fighting continued along the country's border with Cambodia, the Thai military said Thursday, marking the country's first civilian fatalities after the fighting resumed.

The latest fighting was set off by a skirmish on Sunday that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a US-brokered ceasefire that ended five days of fighting in July over territorial disputes.

About two dozen people have been reported killed in the latest fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border and relocated to temporary shelters or have moved to stay with relatives.

A Thai Army statement said Cambodia launched an attack on Wednesday with artillery and mortars against Thai positions, to which it replied with the same kinds of weapons, leading to "the destruction of enemy trucks."

Cambodia's Fresh News online news site said artillery duels were continuing on Thursday.

Thailand has deployed jets to attack military targets. Cambodia has deployed BM-21 rocket launchers. —*PTI*

Bangladesh goes to polls on 12 February

ISLAMABAD, 11 DEC

Bangladesh will hold the general elections on 12 February, its first since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government in a violent student-led protest in August 2024.

"Voting will take place on 12 February, 2026, from 7.30am to 4.30pm," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said in an address to the nation on Thursday. A referendum will simultaneously be held on the voting day to elicit public opinion on a series of reform proposals of the Chief Adviser **Muhammad Yunus**-led National Consensus Commission.

The announcement came a day after the CEC met President Mohammed Shahabuddin.

Yunus has repeatedly said that Bangladesh would witness its "historic" elections in February.

"This is a historic responsibility. If we can fulfil it properly, the next election day will become historic for the people as well," Yunus said while addressing administrative officials at the grassroots on Wednesday.

The last date for submission of nomination papers is 29 December, and scrutiny of nominations will be held from 30 December to 4 January, the schedule said. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is 20 January.

The final list of candidates will be published on January 21. Election campaigns will begin on January 22 and continue until 7:30 am on 10 February, Nasir said.

The last general elections were held in January 2024. Hasina won, marred by controversy and boycott by major parties. —*PTI*

Ex-ISI chief Hameed gets 14 yr jail term

ISLAMABAD, 11 DEC

A military court in Pakistan has sentenced retired Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to 14 years in prison. The court-martial proceedings, which lasted 15 months, found Hameed guilty of engaging in political activities and violating the Official Secrets Act, among other charges.

In its statement, the military outlined that Hameed faced four charges: engaging in political activities, breaching the Official Secrets Act, misuse of authority and government resources, and causing wrongful loss to individuals, although it did not disclose the identities of those affected.

"Faiz Hameed was found guilty on all four counts," said Syed Muhammad Ali, an Islamabad-based security analyst.

Hameed, closely associated with imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan, was detained in 2024 following a Supreme Court inquiry into the Top City project scam. He has the right to appeal. —*PTI*

BACKS US' OIL SEIZURE

Nobel winner appears after 11 months

OSLO, 11 DEC

Venezuelan Opposition leader María Corina Machado appeared in public for the first time in 11 months early Thursday morning, when she waved to supporters from a hotel balcony in Norway's capital hours after her daughter accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf.

Machado and her supporters then sang Venezuela's national anthem before she left the hotel to shake their hands. People erupted in cheers and began chanting, "Freedom! Freedom!" and "Thank you! Thank you!"

Machado, dressed in jeans and a puffer jacket, spent several minutes outside the hotel, where she was joined by members of her family and several of her closest aides.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado waves to the crowd gathered in front of the Grand Hotel, in Oslo, Norway **PHOTO: PTI**

Machado had been in hiding since 9 January, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas, Venezuela's capital. She had been expected to attend the award ceremony Wednesday in Oslo, where her family were among those waiting to see her.

Machado said in an audio recording of a phone call published on the Nobel website that she would not be able to arrive in time for the ceremony but that many people had "risked their lives" for her to arrive in Oslo.

Her daughter, Ana Corina Sosa, accepted the prize in her place.

"She wants to live in a free Venezuela, and she will never give up on that purpose," Sosa said. "That is why we all know that she will be back in Venezuela very soon."

Speaking to press later, Machado backed the US' seizure of an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast, calling it a "necessary step". — *PTI*

Gen Z, Nepal govt reach 10-point deal ahead of polls

KATHMANDU, 11 DEC

Nepal interim PM Sushila Karki **PHOTO: ANI**

Representatives of the Gen Z People's Movement and the Interim Government of Nepal signed a 10-point agreement on Wednesday amid rising rift within the group.

The agreement was sealed at the Prime Minister's Office between the Gen Z Movement Alliance, the Council of Gen Z (led by Sudan Gurung), the Gen Z Front (led by Rakshya Bom), and other splinter groups. However, the deepening rift within the Gen Z groups surfaced during the meeting, with members objecting to the rationality of the agreement, which was made in the absence of the President.

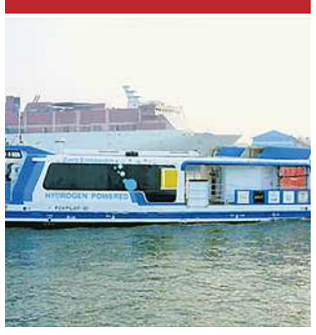
One of the opposing Gen Z groups also tore the draft of the agreement that was floated to them, protesting against the deal after it was signed.

The agreement includes provisions for honouring martyr families, providing relief to the injured, and forming commissions to strengthen anti-corruption efforts.

The government has committed to forming a high-level commission to investigate violent incidents that occurred during the recent protests.

"Today we have completed a step of this struggle by reaching the agreement," Sushila Karki, the interim Prime Minister of Nepal, said. — *ANI*

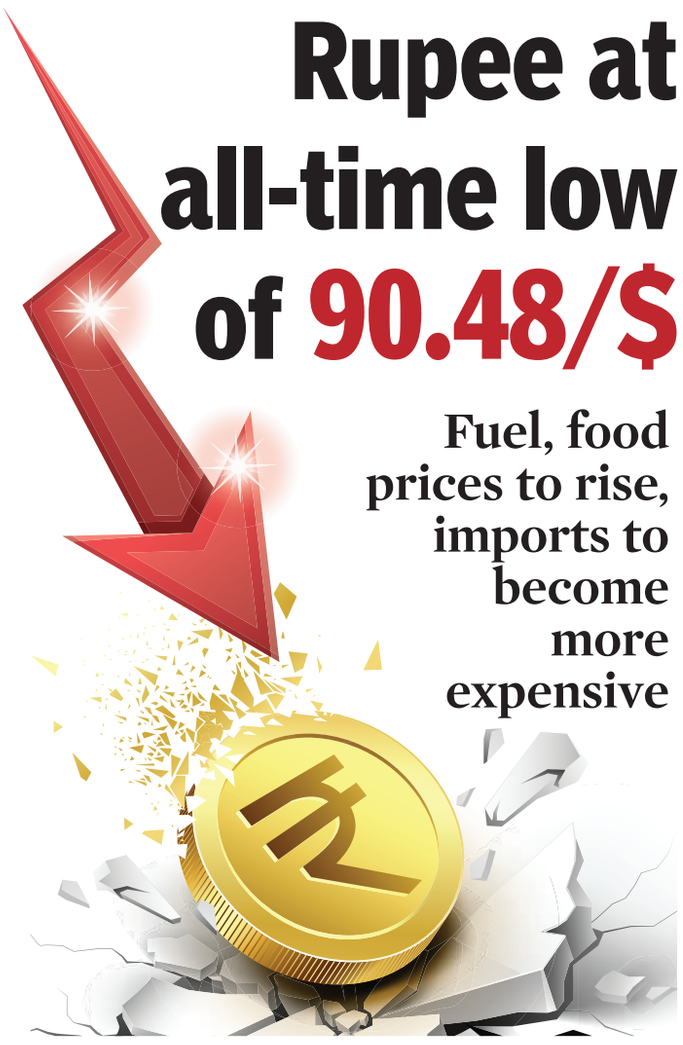
1ST HYDROGEN FUEL-CELL VESSEL



India launched its first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell vessel in Varanasi, marking a major step towards clean and sustainable inland water transport. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off the vessel at Namo Ghat. Powered by hydrogen, the vessel generates electricity through a fuel-cell system with zero emissions, producing only water and heat ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rupee at all-time low of 90.48/$

Fuel, food prices to rise, imports to become more expensive



NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The rupee on Thursday plunged 39 paise to close at a historic low of 90.48 (provisional) against the US dollar amid uncertainty over the India–US trade deal and persistent risk aversion in global markets. The Indian currency opened at 89.95 at the inter-bank foreign exchange but weakened steadily, touching an all-time intra-day low of 90.48 — a 54-paise fall from the previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had also declined, ending 7 paise lower at 89.94.

Forex traders said the continuing delay in finalising the India–US trade agreement has dented investor confidence, while sustained foreign fund outflows and broader market nervousness added downward pressure. The rupee's slide intensified after Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran reportedly indicated that the trade deal may only be concluded by March. Meanwhile, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said the US had received its "best ever" offers from India as the latest round of talks began in New Delhi.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against six major currencies, was trading 0.18 per cent lower at 98.61 after the US Federal Reserve cut rates and issued a less-hawkish guidance. However, the softer dollar did little to cushion the rupee's fall.

- Traders said the delay in finalising the India–US trade agreement has dented investor confidence, while sustained foreign fund outflows and broader market nervousness added downward pressure

A weakening rupee carries significant implications for ordinary citizens, with the impact expected to intensify if the currency continues to hover near record lows.

Fuel prices rise first — and everything else follows. India's reliance on imported crude means petrol, diesel and LPG become costlier, pushing up transportation expenses and, eventually, the price of everyday essentials.

Imported goods turn more expensive. Smartphones, laptops, medical devices and other imported products see price hikes, squeezing consumers and business margins.

Study abroad and foreign travel become costlier. Students face higher tuition and living costs, while overseas vacations become more expensive almost overnight.

Businesses face rising input costs, affecting jobs. Manufacturing, dependent on imported components, may scale back hiring, delay expansions or slow wage growth. *—PTI*

MICROSOFT'S AI PUSH

Cognizant, Infosys, TCS deploy 2 lakh Copilot licences

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella on Thursday announced major commitments to India's AI landscape, including large-scale infrastructure expansion and strategic partnerships with the country's top IT firms.

Microsoft announced partnerships with Cognizant, Infosys, TCS and Wipro, each of which will deploy over 50,000 Microsoft Copilot licences, together exceeding 2,00,000. This marks one of the largest enterprise AIr o l l-outs globally. The collaboration aims to transform workflows across delivery, HR, finance, sales and customer engagement by embedding agentic AI systems capable of autonomous decision-making and insight generation.

Nadella said Microsoft will invest USD 17.5 billion—its largest investment in Asia—to strengthen cloud and AI capabilities across India.

He confirmed that a new sustainable data centre region will go live in 2026, adding to Microsoft's expanding Azure footprint in India, alongside its partnership with Jio. Emphasising digital sovereignty and cybersecurity, Nadella said security must evolve alongside sovereign cloud options, noting that Microsoft analyses "trillions of daily signals" to protect its platforms.

Microsoft will scale its skilling initiatives, aiming to train 20 million Indians in AI, while noting India's rising prominence in global developer communities such as GitHub. *—PTI*

WB approves $600M for clean air in Haryana, UP

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The World Bank on Thursday said the board of Executive Directors has approved financing of about USD 600 million for two programmes in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to help improve air quality for 270 million people, with clean air benefits spilling over to other states. These programmes will also aim at further increasing the attractiveness of both states as business destinations and engines of job creation, the World Bank said in a statement. The Uttar Pradesh (UP) Clean Air Management Program (UPCAMP) (USD 299.66 million) will build on the UP government's Clean Air Plan by investing in key sectors such as transport, agriculture and industry to improve air quality for its people. "The programme will help 3.9 million households gain access to clean cooking," it said. The Haryana Clean Air Project for Sustainable Development Operation (USD 300 million) will support the Haryana government's Action Plan aimed at reducing air pollution through a combination of multi-sectoral interventions, it said. The project will invest in air quality and emission monitoring systems to strengthen the state's ability to better gauge the impact of various sources of pollution, it said. The project will also support investments in clean transport, such as electric bus services and electric three-wheelers in the cities of Gurugram, Sonipat, and Faridabad, it said. *—PTI*

Sebi amends norms to broaden definition for REITs

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has announced the deferment of the third phase of its nomination framework for the securities market, previously scheduled to commence on 15 December. A new implementation date will be communicated later, as per SEBI's circular.

The postponement follows operational challenges encountered by depositories and other stakeholders in adapting to the new guidelines. In January, SEBI introduced measures to reform the nomination process for mutual fund folios and demat accounts, aiming to improve transparency and reduce unclaimed assets in the market. After consultations with various industry bodies, SEBI opted for a phased approach, outlined in a subsequent circular issued in February 2025. The revised guidelines stipulate that if one or more joint account holders die, assets will be transferred to the surviving holder(s) without additional KYC requirements unless previously requested. They also mandate nominations for single holdings and provide measures for better verification. Investors can nominate up to ten individuals, with the option to specify percentage allocations. In the event of the investor's death, assets will be distributed equally among the nominees unless stated otherwise. Notably, nominees will act as trustees for the legal heirs, lacking direct inheritance rights pertaining to deceased nominees. *—PTI*

After 3 days of spiral, mkts rebound

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Sensex and Nifty rebounded, ending a three-day losing streak, supported by gains in auto and metal stocks and a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 426.86 points, or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 84,818.13, after hitting an intraday high of 84,906.93 and a low of 84,150.19 The 50-share NSE Nifty rose 140.55 points, or 0.55 per cent, to close at 25,898.55, recovering steadily from early volatility and finishing near the day's peak of 25,922.80 as most sectors advanced.

Among the Sensex constituents, Eternal, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, UltraTech Cement, Maruti Suzuki India, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Infosys, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and HCL Technologies were the gainers. However, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, PowerGrid, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank and Titan were among the laggards.

Experts explained the shift, domestic markets rebounded after the Fed's expected rate cut and declining US yields, easing FII outflow concerns. Strong domestic inflows and sectoral buying (Auto, IT) drove gains, despite negative Asian sentiment and a weak Rupee.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 275.01 points to settle at 84,391.27, while the broader NSE Nifty fell by 81.65 points to close at a month's low of 25,758. *—PTI*

Prada collaborates with Indian firms for Kolhapuri chappals

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Prada, the renowned Italian luxury fashion house, has signed a memorandum of understanding with two government organisations, LIDCOM and LIDKAR, to produce a limited edition collection of sandals inspired by the traditional Kolhapuri Chappal. The agreement was formalised at the Consulate General of Italy in Mumbai.

"We celebrate Indian craftsmanship through the 'PRADA Made in India x Inspired by Kolhapuri Chappals' project," the brands stated. The sandals will be crafted in collaboration with skilled artisans from Maharashtra and Karnataka, regions known for their craftsmanship.

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal applauded the partnership, suggesting that Kolhapuri chappal exports could reach USD 1 billion annually. "Maharashtra's f o o t- wear has the

p o t e n- tial to be a global brand," he noted. Goyal also shared his personal attachment to Kolhapuri chappals, recalling wearing them in his childhood.

This collaboration follows earlier criticism faced by Prada over its Spring/ Summer 2026 collection, which bore a resemblance to the traditional footwear without proper credit to the artisans. The fashion house responded to the uproar by prioritising partnerships with local artisans.

Prada's new collection, featuring a blend of traditional techniques and modern design, is set to debut in February 2026 across 40 select stores and on its e-commerce platform. "This ethical partnership allows us to recognise and honour the expertise of the artisans," said Prerna Deshbhratar, Managing Director of LIDCOM. *—PTI*

Coca-Cola appoints COO Henrique Braun as new CEO

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

Coca-Cola announced on Wednesday that chief operating officer Henrique Braun will become its next chief executive in March 2026. The board has elected Braun, 57, as CEO effective 31 March, while current chairman and chief executive James Quincey will move into the role of executive chairman.

Braun has spent 30 years at Coca-Cola, holding senior roles across Brazil, Latin America, Greater China and South Korea. Before becoming COO earlier this year, he oversaw supply chain, new business development, marketing, innovation and bottling operations. Born in California and raised in Brazil, he holds degrees from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Michigan State University and Georgia State University.

Lead independent director David Weinberg praised Quincey, 60, as a "transformative leader". During his nine years as chief executive, Coca-Cola added more than ten billion-dollar brands, including BodyArmor and Fairlife, and expanded into alcoholic drinks with Topo Chico Hard Seltzer. Quincey also led a major restructuring in 2020 that cut the company's brand portfolio in half and resulted in thousands of job losses.

As leadership transitions, Coca-Cola faces cooling demand in the US and Europe and heightened scrutiny of its ingredients. Weinberg said the board is confident Braun will drive global growth. *—PTI*

Equity fund inflows jump 21% in November

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Equity mutual funds attracted Rs 29,911 crore in November, marking a 21 per cent rise from the previous month, according to data released by industry body AMFI on Thursday. The increase follows three consecutive months of declining flows, signalling a renewed improvement in investor sentiment.

The stronger equity inflows helped lift the wider mutual fund industry's asset base. Total assets under management (AUM) rose to Rs 80.80 lakh crore in November, up from Rs 79.87 lakh crore in October.

Retail participation through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) showed a marginal easing, with SIP inflows slipping to Rs 29,445 crore, compared with Rs 29,631 crore a month earlier.

Within equities, net inflows climbed from Rs 24,690 crore in October to Rs 29,911 crore in November. However, these remain slightly below the levels seen in the late summer, when inflows stood at Rs 30,421 crore in September and Rs 33,430 crore in August.

Most equity sub-categories saw positive traction, apart from dividend yield and ELSS funds, which reported outflows. Flexicap funds remained a favoured option among investors, drawing the highest inflows at Rs 8,135 crore, although this represented a 9% decline from October's Rs 8,929 crore.

In contrast, debt mutual funds registered a significant outflow of Rs 25,692 crore in November, a sharp reversal from the Rs 1.6 lakh crore influx recorded in October. Meanwhile, gold ETFs saw inflows cool sharply to Rs 3,742 crore, down from Rs 7,743 crore, indicating a reduced appetite for safe-haven assets. *—PTI*

26 invest Rs 4,815 cr in ICICI Prudential AMC

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company (AMC), a subsidiary of ICICI Bank, has raised Rs 4,815 crore from 26 domestic and international investors through a pre-IPO funding round. As part of the transaction, the AMC completed a private placement of 22,240,841 equity shares at Rs 2,165 per share, according to its public announcement on Wednesday.

The fundraise attracted a broad mix of prominent investors, including Lunate Capital, the Estate of the late Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, the Regents of the University of California via IIFL Asset Management, Sarv Investments, 3P India Equity Fund managed by Prashant Jain, PI Opportunities Fund II, 360 One Funds, White oak Capital, HCL Capital, and market veterans Manish Chokani and Madhusudan Kela. Several insurers such as SBI Life, HDFC Life, Kotak Life, Aditya Birla Sun Life, Bajaj Life, TATA AIG and Go Digit General Insurance also participated, alongside firms including Kedaara Capital Public Markets Fund, TIMF Holdings, Malabar India Fund and Clarus Capital I.

ICICI Bank invested a further Rs 2,140 crore to increase its stake by 2 per cent. With the pre-IPO round completed, the company is preparing for its Rs 10,602-crore initial public offering, which opens on 12 December and closes on 16 December.

The IPO, priced at Rs 2,061–Rs 2,165 per share, is an entirely offer-for-sale issue by Prudential Corporation Holdings. ICICI Prudential AMC is scheduled to list on 19 December *—PTI*

Fed cuts rate, sees better economy next year

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

The US Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point on Wednesday, marking its third consecutive reduction. However, the central bank signalled it may pause further cuts in the coming months as it assesses the strength of the economy. Chair Jerome Powell said the Fed is "well positioned to wait and see how the economy evolves," noting that rates are now close to a level that neither stimulates nor restrains growth.

The latest cut brings the key rate down to around 3.6 per cent, its lowest level in nearly three years. Lower rates can gradually reduce borrowing costs for mortgages, car loans, and credit cards, though market conditions also play a role.

The decision exposed rare divisions within the Fed: three officials dissented—the most in six years. Two argued for no change, while Trump-appointed member Stephen Miran backed a larger half-point cut. Projections released alongside the decision suggest policymakers expect only one rate cut next year.

The debate is likely to intensify ahead of December's meeting, with officials split between supporting further cuts to aid hiring and holding rates steady until inflation, still above the 2 per cent target, declines more clearly.

President Trump criticised the move as too modest and hinted he may appoint a new Fed chair when Powell's term ends in May. *—PTI*

ALL THAT GLITTERS ISN'T GOLD

Silver futures hit record Rs 1.9 lakh

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Extending the record-breaking run to a third day, silver prices hit a fresh peak of Rs 1,94,400 per kilo in the futures trade on Thursday, due to strong global trends and a rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

Silver futures soared by Rs 4,985, or 2.64 per cent, to touch an all-time high of Rs 1,94,400 per kg on the Multi-Commodity Exchange (MCX). Silver has been trading at record high levels in the last three sessions, surging by Rs 11,978, or 6.6 per cent, from Rs 1,81,742 per kg on Monday.

This year, silver prices have zoomed by Rs 1.06 lakh (Rs 1,06,487), or 122.07 per cent, from Rs 87,233 per kilo on 31 December 2024.

Meanwhile, gold futures for February delivery appreciated by Rs 845 (0.65 per cent) to Rs 1,30,641 per 10 grams on MCX.

The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday cut interest rates by 25 basis points, while retaining projections for only one reduction in 2026.

Policymakers, however, signalled uncertainty around the pace of future easing, as they upgraded growth forecasts and trimmed inflation estimates for 2025 and 2026.

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In the international market, Comex gold futures for February delivery increased by USD 20.2, or 0.49 per cent, to USD 4,245.2 per ounce, supported by a steep fall in the US dollar index to 98.62 and softer Treasury yields.

Nikunj Saraf, the CEO of Choice Wealth, said gold and silver ETFs have been heroes this year, delivering standout returns while equity markets saw volatility. *— PTI*

PHOTO: X/@PSG

PSG team bus stoned outside Bilbao hotel

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Paris Saint-Germain team bus was pelted with stones outside the team hotel in Bilbao during the night after its Champions League game with Athletic, a source close to the club told AFP on Thursday. The bus was parked and had no passengers, the source said. Media reports said two cracks were visible on the coach, and two people were arrested. The PSG players and staff were able to travel to the city's airport for their Thursday morning flight back to Paris. The club is considering filing a complaint over the incident, said the source. On Wednesday evening, European champion PSG drew 0-0 at Bilbao, a result which left PSG third in the 36-team qualifying league. Bilbao is 28th.—*PTI*

Two Indian origin players in Australia U19 WC squad

MELBOURNE, 11 DEC

Two Indian-origin players, Aryan Sharma and John James, have been named in Australia's 15-member squad for the men's U-19 World Cup, scheduled to be held in Namibia and Zimbabwe from 15 to 6 January February. Aryan, a handy batter and slow left-arm spinner, and James, a right-arm medium pace all-rounder, were both part of the squad that played against India in the youth Tests and one-dayers in September. Besides cricketers of Indian heritage, the squad features two players of Sri Lankan (Naden Cooray and Nitesh Samuel) and one of Chinese Origin (Alex Lee Young). Australia enters the tournament as defending champions, with Oliver Peake as captain.—*PTI*

X/@ARSENAL

Marli Salmon makes his CL debut for Arsenal

LONDON, 11 DEC

Marli Salmon became the sixth youngest player to feature in the Champions League when brought on as a late substitute in Arsenal's 3-0 win at Club Brugge. Salmon is 16 years, 103 days, and came on for Ben White at Jan Breydelstadion on Wednesday, with manager Mikel Arteta saying: "We knew that at some point we had to use him." "He's so young, 16 still, and he's playing in the Champions League," Arteta said. But Salmon is not even the youngest player that Arsenal has fielded this season. That distinction goes to Max Dowman, who was 15 years, 308 days when he entered as a second-half substitute against Slavia Prague last month.—*PTI*

NBA Cup: Oklahoma City demolishes Phoenix Suns

NEW YORK, 11 DEC

Oklahoma City Thunder bagged a 16th straight victory on Wednesday, thrashing Phoenix Suns 138-89 to romp into an NBA Cup semifinal clash with San Antonio Spurs, which stunned the Los Angeles Lakers 132-119. NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 28 points to lead the reigning NBA champion Thunder, which improved to 24-1 to equal the best 25-game start to a season in league history. Thunder dominated from start to finish to book its place in the final four of the in-season tournament in Las Vegas, where it will take on the Spurs on Saturday. New York Knicks and Orlando Magic also meet for a place in Tuesday's final.—*PTI*

U-19 AC: Will ICC urge BCCI to revisit 'no handshake' policy?

ICC doesn't want politics to take front seat

DUBAI, 11 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

India's Asia Cup U-19 campaign will be fronted by Gen Z batting sensations Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, but equal focus will be on whether the BCCI allows the youngsters to exchange handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts, in what would be construed as maintaining sporting civility at the junior level.

While the India U-19 side, under the able leadership of dashing Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre, starts its campaign against the UAE on Friday, it is the match against Pakistan on Sunday that will certainly gain the most traction in the junior continental championship, seen as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup early next year.

In the senior men's Asia Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players have refused to shake hands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack.

However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it, and the normal protocol of sportsman's spirit should be adhered to.

"The boys haven't been told anything. But obviously, BCCI has given explicit instructions to its manager, Anand Datar. Now, if Indian boys don't shake hands with the Pakistan team, then the match referee will have to be informed in advance.

"We know for a fact that **ICC doesn't want politics to take front seat** when it comes to junior cricket. So it is a case of both bad optics and public sentiment," a BCCI official in the know of things told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

As far as the tournament is concerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as the top two teams from group A. Apart from India and Pakistan, the other two sides are Malaysia and the UAE, and they don't have a lot of experience playing 50-over cricket.

Both Suryavanshi and skipper Mhatre are coming into the tournament following a great run of form in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. While Mhatre played a massive role in the group league stages with back-to-back centuries and a fifty, Suryavanshi

Vaibhav Suryavanshi PHOTO: PTI

became the youngest player in SMAT history to hit a century, against Maharashtra.

In India's squad of 15, these are two boys who have played more than 30 senior-level games across the three formats and cumulatively scored nine centuries. —*PTI*

2ND TEST

Hay's 61 helps NZ to a 1st-innings lead over West Indies

WELLINGTON, 11 DEC

Mitch Hay PHOTO: PTI

Mitch Hay scored 61 in his first test innings Thursday to help New Zealand to a 73-run first-innings lead over the West Indies on the second day of the second test.

The wicketkeeper-batter who cut his teeth in seven one-day internationals and 12 T20s was called into test cricket as a replacement for the injured Tom Blundell. He followed Devon Conway's 60 at the top of the innings to guide New Zealand to 278.

New Zealand then claimed two wickets in 10 overs before stumps, leaving the West Indies 32-2, still 41 behind. John Campbell (14) was bowled by Michael Rae, leaving a ball which cut back from outside off, and nightwatchman Anderson Phillip (0) was trapped lbw by Jacob Duffy.

"At that time of day, their batters have got nothing to gain, and we've got all to gain, so it was cool to get a couple there," Duffy said. "Any time you get a lead, it's not too bad.

"A couple of guys will be a bit gutted to get a start and not go on, but any time you get a lead and get them two down, you have to be happy with that."

The West Indies bowlers made sure New Zealand's task of surpassing the tourists' first innings of 205 was a difficult one on a pitch at the Basin Reserve, which retained pace, bounce, and some treacherous movement well into the second day.

That was demonstrated in the first session, in which New Zealand, after resuming at 24-0, gained a strong position at 112-2 by lunch while losing Tom Latham (11) and Kane Williamson (37) to superb pieces of seam bowling.

Latham was bowled by Kemar Roach in the fifth over of the day with a ball that jagged back sharply from outside off and pierced his tentative defensive shot. West Indies 205 and 32 for 2 (King 15*, Rae 1-4, Duffy 1-8) trail New Zealand 278 for 9 dec (Hay 61, Conway 60, Phillip 3-70) by 41 runs. —*PTI*

SPLIT COACHING

Whatever is good for cricket, BCCI should do it: Kapil Dev

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Former India captain Kapil Dev on Thursday steered clear of endorsing the idea of split coaches after the team's recent 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa at home, saying the BCCI should adopt whatever coaching structure best serves Indian cricket.

Asked whether separate coaches for red-ball and white-ball formats could be an answer to end India's recent run of reverses in Tests at home, Kapil said: "I don't know... I can't answer that. You have to really work something like that in your mind and say what should happen. Whatever is good for cricket, I think they should do it. Rejected the notion that it is tougher to be an athlete in the social-media era than during his playing days.No, it's always the same. It was difficult then; it is difficult now. It was easy then, and it is easy now. Your mindset is more important," he said.On whether the growing financial pull of T20 leagues has overshadowed national representation, Kapil said each player weighs priorities differently."Everybody loves money, but some players feel that it is very important.

Kapil Dev PHOTO: PTI

Golf: PGTI launches '72 The League'

The Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) on Thursday announced the launch of '72 The League', a new national-level franchise-based tournament scheduled to be held from 21 February to 6 March next year.

Created in partnership with Game of Life Sports (GOLS), the inaugural edition of 72 The League will feature six city-based franchises, each comprising 10 professional players selected through a player auction in January 2026.

That is the difference," PGTI president Kapil Dev told reporters when asked whether the initiative was a reaction to the launch of the IGPL. —*PTI*

ISL clubs demand AIFF Constitution amendments

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Twelve Indian Super League (ISL) clubs on Thursday urged the All India Football Federation (AIFF) to amend the "commercially restrictive" clauses of its constitution during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 20 December, in another reminder that the domestic game may collapse if immediate steps are not taken.

All the ISL teams, except for East Bengal, said the AIFF should transfer the long-term rights of the top-tier league to the clubs if the national federation is unable to bring the necessary amendments or provide a commercially viable framework.

"...the AIFF should either expressly support removal of commercially restrictive clauses in the Constitution, or itself undertake these amendments at the forthcoming AGM on 20 December 2025," the clubs wrote in a letter to the AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey.

"Thereafter, the federation, along with the support of the Government and the Clubs, proceeds to transparently identify an appropriate commercial partner.

"If the AIFF is unwilling or unable to support the necessary amendments or provide a commercially viable framework for the league, then the only logical solution is for the Federation to transfer the long-term rights of the league to the Clubs."

Thursday's letter from the ISL clubs came after a missive a few days back in which they had asked the AIFF to consider a framework under which they (the ISL clubs) may collectively form a consortium to own/operate the league as majority owners, alongside the national federation and aligned investors, in case a suitable commercial partner is not found.

A recent tender floated by the AIFF for the commercial rights of the ISL could not find any bidder. —*PTI*

Sindhu, Sen in Indian team for Badminton Asia Team

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Two-time Olympics medallist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen, and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of the Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China, from 3-8 February.

India are defending champion in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team has won two bronze medals in the past."Selected based on ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medallist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The world No 13 Sen will be the top-ranked men's singles player in the squad, which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepalli. Satwik-Chirag will lead the doubles unit along with Guwahati Masters runners-up Sai Pratheek K and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, as well as Hariharan Amsakarunan. In the women's category, Sindhu will be supported by world junior championships silver medalist Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, Rakshita Sree Santhosh Ramraj, and Malvika Bansod in singles. Syed Modi International champions Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly will lead India's charge in the doubles, while Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, and Tanisha Crasto complete the squad. —*PTI*

East Bengal defeats Pak's Karachi City

KATHMANDU, 11 DEC

East Bengal earned a second successive victory in the SAFF Women's Club Championship 2025 by defeating Pakistani side Karachi City 2-0 at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu on Thursday.

It began its campaign in the tournament with a 4-0 thumping of Bhutan's Transport United on December 9, and followed it up with another victory to maintain its pristine record in the competition.

East Bengal took an early lead in the match, with Sulanjana Raul striking in the fifth minute to put it ahead, before Resty Nanziri struck shortly after half-time to double the lead.

The SAFF Women's Club Championship features one representative each from the Federation's top five-ranked nations. This edition includes teams from India (East Bengal), Nepal (APF), Bangladesh (Nasrin Sporting Club), Bhutan (Transport United), and Pakistan (Karachi City).

Resty Nanziri doubled East Bengal's lead in the second half of its match against Karachi City PHOTO: X/@EASTBENGAL_FC

East Bengal next faces Nasrin Sporting Club of Bangladesh on 14 December. —*PTI*

Stands named after Yuvraj and Harmanpreet

MULLANPUR, 11 DEC

World Cup winners Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur were on Thursday immortalized at the New Chandigarh Stadium with stands named in their honour.Yuvraj, player of the tournament for the 2011 ODI World Cup, and Harmanpreet, who recently captained India to their first-ever Women's World Cup trophy, were surrounded by friends, family, and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the occasion.

Yuvraj was also seen giving a pep talk to the Indian team in a huddle before the second T20 International against South Africa.

His longtime teammate Harbhajan Singh has a pavilion named after him at the stadium, and Harmanpreet joined him on the other side of the sightscreen on Thursday. —*PTI*

FREESTYLE CHESS GRAND SLAM FINAL

Carlsen to face Aronian in title match

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

Former world champion Magnus Carlsen outlasted Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov to reach the title clash of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Final, where he will face USA's Levon Aronian.

Sindarov pushed Carlsen hard, winning the second rapid game to force a blitz tiebreak, which witnessed intense time scrambles. The Norwegian won the first 5+2 game before eking out a draw in the second to confirm his progression.

"It was a complete and utter meltdown by both players. I don't know what to say, it was just sport, I suppose," said Carlsen on his blitz games against Sindarov. "I guess I outlasted him more than anything else, but it feels good to be in the Final."

Magnus Carlsen and Javokhir Sindarov in action during their semifinal clash PHOTO: X/@FREESTYLE CHESS

In the other semifinal, Aronian outclassed German GM Vincent Keymer 2-0 in the blitz tiebreaks, after draws in the two opening rapid rounds.

Aronian will now take on Carlsen for the top spot, which will come with a prize pot of $200,000.

In the lower bracket, India's Arjun Erigaisi bettered American GM Hans Niemann in the semifinal. Erigaisi will now face the USA's Fabiano Caruana for the fifth spot.

In the second semifinal, Vincent Keymer had Aronian under pressure for long stretches of their second game but missed his opponent's extraordinary escape. The match moved into a tiebreak, where Aronian capitalized in blitz, winning 2–0 to reach his second Grand Final of the season. —*PTI*

Indian Women's League to start on 20 Dec in Kolkata

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Indian Women's League 2025-26 will kick off on December 20 at the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in Kolkata, with Sethu FC taking on Kickstart FC in the opening match.

The IWL will be played in two phases, with the first one stretching from December 20 to 9 January 2026, during which the eight teams will play 28 matches, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday.

The NCoE in Kolkata and the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani are the two venues for the league, which is being held in two centralised venues this season.

The second phase of the IWL is set to be held from April 20 to 10 May 2026, thus allowing player availability for the senior and U20 women's national teams, which will participate in their respective AFC Women's Asian Cups categories next year.

The gap between phases 1 and 2 of the IWL also allows the three national teams ample time to have preparatory camps ahead of the continental campaigns, the AIFF said. —*PTI*